United Nations A/54/PV.17

General Assembly
Fifty-fourth session

Official Records

17th plenary meeting
Wednesday, 29 September 1999, 3 p.m.
New York

President: Mr. Gurirab ..... (Namibia)

The meeting was called to order at 3.05 p.m.

Agenda item 9 *(continued)*

General debate

The President: I now call on the Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Foreign Trade of Jamaica, His Excellency The Honourable Seymour Mullings.

Mr. Mullings (Jamaica): On behalf of the delegation of Jamaica I extend to you, Sir, our congratulations on your election to the presidency of the General Assembly at its fifty-fourth session. You and your country, Namibia, are graduates of the United Nations, steeped in its principles, faithful to its causes and committed to its goals. We have full confidence that your leadership will continue to guide us this session in the adoption of constructive decisions which will serve to strengthen the role of the Organization in world affairs.

We express our appreciation to the outgoing President, Mr. Didier Opertti, Minister for Foreign Affairs of Uruguay, for his outstanding work in conducting the business of our last session. We congratulate the Secretary-General for his report (A/54/1) outlining the activities of the Organization over the past year and containing his vision for its future work.

Jamaica welcomes the three States that this year have joined the membership of the United Nations: the Republic of Kiribati, the Republic of Nauru and the Kingdom of Tonga. Their presence will enrich our deliberations as they bring their particular experiences and perspectives to influence the direction and work of the Organization. Their admission coincides with the holding of the special session of the General Assembly on small island developing States which over the last two days addressed the particular vulnerabilities of these States, which merit special attention within the international community.

The three nations we welcome today are also linked to Jamaica through the Commonwealth of Nations. This year the Commonwealth celebrates its fiftieth anniversary, and we salute its achievements in cooperation — especially in promoting the development objectives of its membership — including the recent initiatives to address the special problems of smaller States.

The widening of the gap between rich and poor and the increasing marginalization of a large number of developing countries within the world economic framework are urgent matters demanding the attention of the international community. The reasons for these trends are well-known: superior endowments of natural resources; early advantages in modernizing production processes; high levels of capital accumulation and technological development — all have helped consolidate the dominance of the developed countries in world production and trade. Countries which started later in the day will not find it easy to close the gap.

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And it is not true that the developing countries have only themselves to blame. Most of us have implemented programmes of structural adjustment and stabilization policies, but we have found that the current orthodoxy of free markets and a development model based on liberalization, deregulation and privatization is not providing the promised benefits in trade and investment flows. There is evident need to review the prescriptions and to promote a development policy which takes into greater account the specific socio-economic context of developing countries and to devise more equitable arrangements in international economic relations.

In an interdependent world, the human dimension of the development equation, especially the growing incidence of poverty and all its manifestations, must continue to be a matter of concern to the entire global community. It is therefore essential that we seek to establish a better framework for development cooperation and to implement an agenda for development as a matter of priority within the United Nations system.

Currently, what we are seeing is a withering of interest and diminished commitment on the issue of cooperation for development and a hardening of attitudes in an atmosphere which preaches competitiveness and the survival of the fittest. It is clear to us that special arrangements are needed, not only in relation to special categories of countries, but also in relation to commodities, where serious problems would result from the rigorous application of the dogma of free trade. Regrettably, even where such special arrangements exist they are under threat.

The challenge to the banana regime established within the framework of the Lomé Convention and the ruling of the World Trade Organization (WTO) panel, which has now led to negotiations for an amended regime, sends a message which is particularly discouraging and signals the indifference of some countries to the plight of others. The end result is not yet determined, but at this time the economies of some Caribbean States face a danger not just to their prospects for economic stability and growth, but to their very survival. Many appeals have been made which have gone unheeded. More than anything else, the banana controversy has signified the extent to which the interests of small producers are at the mercy of those in a position of dominance in the world economy and world trade.

Another discouraging trend is the diminished significance and reduced contributions of donor countries in the area of development cooperation. At a time of the increasing incidence of poverty and a looming threat of marginalization, levels of official development assistance have been steadily decreasing at both the bilateral and the multilateral levels. In the case of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), technical assistance has been shrinking, especially over the last five years. In 1994, contributions to UNDP were in the region of $1.1 billion. This has steadily declined to the current level for this year of $718 million.

We have been supporting initiatives for reform in order to promote better coordination and greater efficiency and cost-effectiveness in the delivery of technical assistance in the operational activities of the United Nations. What we have seen, however, is that the reform process seems more directed at generating cost savings and achieving a pooling of resources without increasing the quantum of funding available for development cooperation under the auspices of the United Nations. The process under way is one of contraction of United Nations-related development activities at the country level and a withering-away of the role of the United Nations in an area of critical importance for developing countries. The reduced impact of the United Nations at the country level is already significant and comes at a time when the needs are greater than ever.

We call for a new commitment to development cooperation, a new global partnership between the developed and the developing countries and a new dialogue to review the policies and principles directing international economic relations, and for a new dispensation with regard to policy prescriptions affecting the development process. Without this, developing countries will be engulfed in the perils of globalization with consequences not just for economic welfare, but for the viability of political structures and social stability.

There are also other, more insidious dimensions of globalization, especially those which impinge on the security of States, which we must consider. Within the growing internationalization of markets facilitated by improved technology and policies of liberalization, the spectre of transnational crime has grown to significant proportions, especially in the illicit trade in narcotics and small arms. Together, these instruments of death and destruction represent a significant danger to the internal security of many countries, fostering criminal activities which serve to destabilize and corrupt the social order, to undermine democratic institutions and to increase lawlessness.

We believe that this growing trade in weapons, which promotes organized crime, terrorist activities and drug trafficking, requires the urgent attention of the international community. Jamaica therefore welcomes the arrangements for the holding of the first international conference on small arms, which is to take place in the year 2000. We look forward to this as a good opportunity to develop a programme for implementation by Member States to control the scale and distribution of these weapons.

On reviewing the broader issue of international security, we have to note developments which give rise to concern and anxiety about the future of the world order and the role of the United Nations. The Organization should become engaged wherever international peace is threatened and where conflicts break out. Although the danger of global conflict arising from ideological confrontation has now, in large measure, receded, the world is still full of threats to peace.

Wars continue to be waged at the regional level, primarily as a result of regional rivalries and unresolved territorial disputes. At the national level, ethnic strife and political divisiveness have continued to fuel internal conflict, leading to heavy loss of life and economic disruption and affecting regional stability from the spill-over of refugees to neighbouring States.

We endorse the Secretary-General's strategy of quiet diplomacy and urge him to use his influence wherever possible to forestall the outbreak of conflict and to promote peace and reconciliation between disputing parties. In accordance with the principles of national sovereignty, he will need the cooperation and support of Member States in his efforts for the maintenance of peace, as delicate problems can arise in relation to any process of diplomatic intervention with respect to the role to be undertaken by the United Nations and appropriate regional organizations.

During the past year, events in the Balkans have raised profound questions about the principle of intervention, the use of force, the scale of military enforcement and the role of the Security Council. The debate on these questions has revealed differing perspectives, elements of consensus and varying positions on the applicable principles of international law. In recent times, we have witnessed atrocities committed as a result of the practice of ethnic cleansing as communities rise up against each other to settle old grievances. We all must continue to condemn these practices and understand the need for some kind of action to halt such excesses which violate international humanitarian norms.

However, the principles of international law affecting the sovereignty of States and the use of force should not be brushed aside. We believe in the adoption of an approach which has the confidence of the international community whereby diplomatic and any necessary enforcement action is taken or authorized by the multilateral institutions entrusted with safeguarding international peace and security. The Security Council has the primary responsibility. It should not be ignored and disregarded in favour of unilateral action on the part of any State or group of States.

While the situation in the Balkans has dominated international attention over the past year, more attention should be given to the situation in Africa, where even more serious problems have arisen involving ethnic strife and political turmoil, affecting neighbouring States and creating humanitarian emergencies. As the Secretary-General has observed in his report, too little attention has been given to the conflicts arising in Africa despite the enormous toll in loss of life and in disruption and suffering resulting from armed insurgencies and inter-State conflict. However, we are encouraged by the process taking place in the West African region affecting Liberia and Sierra Leone. We must pay tribute to the work of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), which has shouldered the burden of peace-building in these two States so battered by civil conflict.

We also note with appreciation the efforts of the Organization of African Unity (OAU) in regard to the situation in the Great Lakes region and hope that the Lusaka Agreement will form the basis for reconciliation and peace. The situation in Angola remains a tragic one for the country, and the international community should remain united in support of measures taken against the UNITA insurgency and to bring an end to the nightmare which has for so long impeded the progress of that country.

We are distressed by the continuing problems in the Horn of Africa. We continue to support regional efforts towards peacemaking between Ethiopia and Eritrea and welcome the OAU framework agreement which has been worked out to assist the parties to reach a settlement. We urge the Secretary-General to continue to maintain close contact with the parties in all the areas of tension, with the aim of promoting peace and stability, and to foster a spirit of reconciliation so that African States may be able to concentrate their efforts in confronting the critical challenges of economic and social development.

In the Middle East, while the situation still remains troublesome, there are some signs of renewed hope with the revival of the peace process and the emergence of a more positive climate for making progress towards a settlement. We welcome the signing of the Sharm el-Sheikh Memorandum earlier this month and urge the parties to move towards accommodation, to seek to realize the legitimate rights of all parties as the basis for a just and durable peace. The challenge is formidable and the solution will require statesmanship and courage.

In South-East Asia the outbreak of violence in East Timor is a matter which has caused deep concern. As there is an obvious need for ensuring the safety of the inhabitants of the territory, we fully support the deployment of the international force which is now in the territory to maintain order. It is necessary now to contemplate the next step, which will be to devise arrangements for the political future of the territory.

In our area of Latin America and the Caribbean there remain a number of unresolved territorial disputes but our expectation is that States in our region will use available mechanisms to resolve such disputes by peaceful means. In the Caribbean our efforts are directed towards developing greater integration both within the Caribbean Community and within the wider ambit of the Association of Caribbean States, ACS. This is part of our regional effort towards establishing a regime of peace and cooperation in the Caribbean Sea. In this regard, I should express our ongoing concern over the remaining remnants of cold war politics in our region. The continuation of the embargo against Cuba is a source of tension and carries the risk of conflict, which is particularly troubling for neighbouring States. In the spirit of the friendly relations we enjoy with Cuba and the United States, we call for dialogue, the normalization of relations and an end to policies of confrontation and exclusion.

Small countries have an important interest in ensuring that peace and stability is a permanent feature of the world order. In the absence of military power we depend on diplomacy and on the United Nations and its machinery and international adherence to its principles to safeguard and protect those who are militarily weak. It is in our interest to seek to strengthen and uphold all the multilateral institutions dedicated to this effort. The Security Council, which has such an important role in this structure, should be given the fullest support in meeting its responsibilities. This is best achieved through the democratic participation of the United Nations membership in the work of the Council, which serves to strengthen its effectiveness and to give it greater credibility within the international system.

Jamaica supports that process and aspires for membership of the Council for a two-year period beginning next year. We do so out of a motivation to make our contribution as a small State in the management of international peace and security. We are driven by a strong commitment to multilateralism and to upholding the principles of the Charter and by a determination to exercise a careful and balanced judgement in relation to all issues affecting peace and security which may come before us. It will be our goal to assist the Security Council to work effectively and to act decisively. We will seek to involve the broader membership in its consultations and to influence the discharge of the Council's responsibilities with fairness and with full respect for the legitimate interests of all parties, within the broader interest of international peace and security.

The work of the United Nations in the area of humanitarian relief has always been an important part of its operations, and this is the area in which its work has had the most direct impact and practical meaning at the level of the people. This is particularly so in the delivery of emergency relief in natural disasters. The increase in the scale and intensity of earthquakes, hurricanes, floods and famine in recent times has increased the demands on the system, and there is an obvious need to maintain capability and readiness in the relevant agencies. At the same time, we should support the various initiatives for disaster prevention, including the enforcement of stricter building codes, improved drainage systems, the exchange of scientific knowledge, increased monitoring and the use of early-warning systems to protect ourselves and mitigate the damage.

Much more can be done to avert disasters in those areas where members have greater control and power. Man-made disasters create a tragic problem of refugees, which otherwise is often the result of war, persecution or political turmoil. The tragic plight of refugees uprooted from their homes and forced to flee is a sad and disturbing picture, and even more so for the neighbouring States, which are often poor countries that do not have the means to handle heavy inflows.

As we have seen from the Secretary-General's report, one of the distressing practices in recent conflicts has been the deliberate targeting of civilians and humanitarian workers. This unacceptable flouting of humanitarian norms is a matter of serious concern for us and indicates the need for further elaboration of principles of international humanitarian law applicable in time of war.

Our review of the state of the world in the economic, political and humanitarian dimensions suggests the need for greater effort in building political commitment and investing resources for achieving common goals. Too many of the old problems remain unresolved, and our unity of purpose is too often compromised by political differences and considerations of narrow economic interests. At a time of increasing globalization, the reality of interdependence should be leading us in the other direction — towards mutual respect, tolerance, understanding and partnership in a world of diversity, for these are the true foundations of multilateralism.

As we close this century and approach the new millennium, we should do so in the hope of reaching greater achievements by acting in concert to uphold our ideals of humanity and to fight the common enemies of mankind: war, poverty, human suffering and injustice. This should be our firm resolve.

The President: I now call on the Minister for Foreign Affairs of Poland, His Excellency Mr. Bronislav Geremek.

Mr. Geremek (Poland): Please accept my congratulations, Sir, on your election to the presidency of the General Assembly at its current session. We are indeed glad to have a distinguished statesman from Africa presiding over important deliberations on global security and development. I am sure that your personal attributes, as well as your diplomatic skills, will ensure the success that is expected from the Assembly. The delegation of Poland will do its best to assist you in your important functions. My compliments go also to the President of the General Assembly at its fifty-third session, Mr. Didier Opertti of Uruguay, for the outstanding commitment he demonstrated during his presidency.

It is with satisfaction that we welcome in our midst the new Members of the United Nations: the Republic of Kiribati, the Republic of Nauru and the Kingdom of Tonga.

It was with the utmost attention that we listened to the Secretary-General's introduction of his report on the work of the Organization. His interesting and highly stimulating ideas will guide us throughout the whole fifty-fourth session of the General Assembly. May I assure the Secretary-General of our deep respect and support for all his endeavours.

In my statement today, I wish to focus on the three issues which, in my view, are at the centre of discussions within this Organization. These are, first, human freedoms, and in particular the question of rethinking the principle of national sovereignty and non-interference; secondly, current challenges to the United Nations Charter-based system of international security; and thirdly, coping with contradictions of globalization through better international cooperation.

We have recently been witnessing new, painful manifestations of ethnic hatred in Kosovo. Armed clashes have again shaken the north Caucasus. East Timor is another example of intolerance and the folly of violence. We pay homage to the victims of this violence. But the people in all the crisis-stricken areas expect more from us than just words of sympathy.

We should pose ourselves some questions: could these new outbursts of conflict have been prevented? Is there a political will to head them off in the future? If the answer is positive, then what should be done to translate our political commitment into action in a concerted and effective way? How should the system of international relations be improved to give people the hope that they will not be left defenceless in the face of genocide and persecution?

The United Nations Charter-based system of international security was born of the lessons of a devastating world war which started with blatant violations of sovereignty of States. To address this reality, the system of international law and institutions was rightly geared to give those nations a sense of security and to prevent inter-State conflict. Most of today's conflicts, however, are of an intra-State nature. They stem from human rights abuses, social tensions or the collapse of State structures. Can we tackle the new challenges with existing concepts and notions only?

We have come to understand that absolute sovereignty and total non-interference are no longer tenable. There is not, and there cannot be, a sovereign right to ethnic cleansing and genocide. We have learned that what should not be repeated is the unacceptable inaction which occurred in the past, such as in the Rwandan crisis. Rwanda demonstrates what Kosovo might have become had we not intervened in 1999. Kosovo demonstrates what Rwanda might have been had we intervened in 1994. The burden of responsibility is enormous, the lesson clear.

At the same time, we should follow the principle that our responsibility is the same for all ethnic groups. In Kosovo the ethnic cleansing of Albanians by Serbs has been stopped and reversed, but now we witness that the presence of Serbs and Roma in Kosovo is under threat.

In this decade the international community has through its actions — recently in Kosovo and in East Timor — recognized the universal political and moral imperative to act in order to stop gross and systematic violations of human rights.

This recognition, setting aside the distinction between inter- and intra-State conflicts, reflects the spirit of the Charter of the United Nations.

Indeed, the central figure of the system of the United Nations must be the human being — his or her right to a peaceful life, to personal freedom, to a decent existence and dignity. When human life and freedoms are assailed and individual rights brutally violated, then we must not remain indifferent and unconcerned: we cannot stand idle.

The imperative to act raises the question of the right to act. We have recognized that the walls of sovereignty cannot be used to conceal and legitimize the abuse of human rights and fundamental freedoms. Sovereignty cannot mean impunity for genocide and human rights abuses.

Let us all remember that it remains one of the fundamental objectives of the United Nations

> "to reaffirm faith in fundamental human rights, in the dignity and worth of the human person, in the equal rights of men and women and of nations large and small".

The primacy of the human person and human rights, however, has to be adequately reflected in the application of international law. This is not an easy task, first, because there are still too many cases where behind hypocritical lip-service to human rights there exist practices of curbing and limiting those rights for the sake of preserving political power; secondly, because the legal framework of intervention, which should ensure the possibility of quick and effective action, is too often distorted by selective and subjective interpretations.

On the one hand, the banner of humanitarian intervention should not be used as a pretext for imposing political control and domination from the outside. We want to make the walls of sovereignty surmountable, but not for all purposes. On the other hand, the principle of humanitarian intervention has to be fairly and consistently applied to avoid double standards.

The development of international law should thus uphold the basic truth that a sustainable, lasting and secure order in international relations can be built only on the freedom of the human being.

The principle of solidarity in international relations should grow in importance, since it also provides the key to the effectiveness of the mission of the United Nations.

Acting for universal observance of human rights while preserving the necessary content of the notion of sovereignty raises the question of the best strategies for humanitarian intervention. We have but to agree that intervention by force is an instrument of last resort. What is preferable is an early and cooperative engagement to correct the practices that give rise to concern. There is no doubt that armed intervention is a sign of the failure of cooperative methods.

We support wholeheartedly the efforts to foster a new culture of prevention. The basis for this philosophy should be the universal recognition that international commitments undertaken by States in the field of human rights are matters of direct and legitimate concern to other States as well, before their abuse degenerates into a threat to international peace and security. Human rights do not belong exclusively to the internal affairs of States.

The present session of the General Assembly will lead us into the year 2000. Let this symbolic date inspire us to reflect upon the mission of the United Nations, to make the millennium summit a truly meaningful event. On the eve of the next millennium, the world still needs the United Nations, while the United Nations needs a new vision. Faced with new and more demanding challenges, we are of the opinion that the solutions to them require joint and concerted actions by the whole community of States. The United Nations needs a reinforced commitment by its Member States to the purposes and principles enshrined in the Charter.

Let us try to find new strength for the Organization by reaching back to the intellectual and normative origins of the United Nations. Contrary to some assertions, we believe that the Charter is not outdated in its basic message. What it needs is a new, fresh and visionary

reading in the context of new international realities and challenges. For example, with respect to Chapter VIII of the Charter, we note that many of today's conflicts are local in nature. It is for this reason that the relationship between the United Nations and regional security needs to be further explored.

Those actors who are closer to events and have a larger stake in regional stability might be the ones who would be willing to react more promptly and with greater determination. This is why Poland supports increased responsibility of regional organizations for conflict prevention and crisis management. In regions where such organizations exist and have the necessary potential, they should be involved more actively in solving substantial problems. One possible example of how to use them constructively is the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe.

Thus, the key to effective use of the principle of subsidiarity is closer political and operational cooperation between the Security Council and regional organizations.

A debate on United Nations reform has been going on for a number of years. The fiftieth anniversary of the Organization stimulated the discussion, which resulted in a universal understanding of the need for changes. Many of those changes have already been implemented, thanks to the tireless efforts of the Secretary-General. This process should, however, be deepened and accelerated. The Security Council offers a case in point.

The Security Council, upon which primary responsibility has been conferred for the maintenance of international peace and security, occasionally finds it difficult to act in situations of inter-State or local armed conflicts, even when those situations have a dangerous spillover potential. Whether for reasons of broad ideological motivations or narrow national interests, members can block vitally needed decisions, and adversely affect the security of certain regions. How are we to eliminate situations in which the Security Council is prevented from taking up its responsibilities? How are we to increase the effectiveness of the Security Council, combining effectiveness with enhanced representativeness? Reform of the Security Council is long overdue: let us undertake a decisive effort to make it a reality. Let us think anew of how to strengthen the authority of the Council and preclude the possibility that its decisions will be ignored or misimplemented by individual States.

(spoke in French)

A few weeks ago, two young Africans froze to death on their flight between Conakry and Brussels. They had stowed away in the landing gear of the aircraft. They left behind a moving appeal addressed to the people and politicians in charge in Europe that has already been quoted in this Hall. In view of the special nature of that appeal, I should once again like to quote from it. They wrote:

> "Help us. ... We are suffering enormously in Africa. ... We have war, disease and we lack food. ... We wish to be educated and we ask you to help us so that we can study and be, in Africa, just the same as you are".

There is no more eloquent appeal to people's hearts and consciences than those words of despair written by children.

We must find the right solutions to the social and economic failures, to the threats and to the lack of prospects that people and societies face and consider the urgent need to change the present framework of international cooperation. Frustration and the lack of social action cause conflict and a lack of stability. We must think about how to integrate our social and economic programmes with the general imperative of the new culture of prevention.

Poland is prepared to participate in these efforts, the aim of which is to build a world based on these principles. However, our resources are limited. Our country is only just emerging from a period of major economic crisis caused by the communist system and its centralized planning, with its waste and bad management. Even so, we are now creating a complex and effective system of cooperation for development that will demonstrate our commitment in poverty eradication activities. At the same time, we are prepared to share with other countries the development experience we ourselves have acquired during the process of reform of our political and economic systems over the last 10 years of transformation.

Globalization must become a process with a human face. Certain basic principles must be better integrated into the development machinery: specifically, solidarity; combating marginalization; responsibility; and equal opportunity. Combating marginalization: that of the least developed countries, which do not yet enjoy the benefits

of globalization. Responsibility: that of Governments in implementing policies of good governance, in respecting human rights and in being aware that the well-being of all people everywhere is just as important as the well-being of their own nations. Equal opportunity: for the poorest, and those who are still sidelined by society. And solidarity: in facing our common challenges — terrorism, organized crime, environmental threats, natural disasters, AIDS — together.

Unfortunately, we still have much left to do before we attain these goals. The 1999 United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) *Human Development Report* provides fresh, shocking evidence of social breakdown and threats to human security. The challenges I have just mentioned are just part of a more universal question: how can we respond to the new realities of the world? Global policies have not been fully adapted to cover the increasing number of complicated and contradictory phenomena that cannot be tackled with traditional diplomatic instruments. The process of designing policies is still basically the job of individual nations, whereas the challenges we are facing require creative cooperation at the global level. It is for this reason that, Governments must further integrate the idea of international cooperation into their national policies, while avoiding the temptation of authoritarianism. This, however, highlights the urgent need to revise and strengthen our institutional arrangements regarding the design of global policy, particularly with regard to the most complex problems of trade, finance and the environment.

International cooperation must be more open to other actors in civil society by reflecting the rich network of relationships. While several countries are re-evaluating their national policies, democratizing their societies, privatizing their national economies and decentralizing economic and political power, at the international level we are, broadly speaking, still confining ourselves to conventional intergovernmental actions. The United Nations must promote active international cooperation whereby governments and the various sectors of civil society act together towards common goals.

In this connection, we welcome the "Partners for Development" initiative of the Secretary-General of the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD). By breaking from normal practice, this will allow more active participation by the public and private sectors and by representatives of government and the business and intellectual worlds in resolving various complex development problems.

(spoke in English)

As someone who has witnessed the atrocities but also the tremendous progress that the twentieth century has brought us, I look towards the coming century with much optimism. This optimism is justified first and foremost by the liberation of nations and peoples, the wave of democratization, the market reforms all over the world and the universal understanding of human rights ideals. Fewer people live in constant fear of arbitrary arrest, torture or worse. I also look towards the coming century with hope because I see the predominant will to consolidate those recent achievements.

Address by Mr. Malam Bacai Sanha, President of the Republic of Guinea-Bissau

The President: The Assembly will now hear an address by the President of the Republic of Guinea-Bissau.

Mr. Malam Bacai Sanha, President of the Republic of Guinea-Bissau, was escorted into the General Assembly Hall.

The President: On behalf of the General Assembly, I have the honour to welcome to the United Nations the President of the Republic of Guinea-Bissau, His Excellency Mr. Malam Bacai Sanha, and to invite him to address the Assembly.

President Sanha (*spoke in Portuguese; French text furnished by the delegation*): Guinea-Bissau is gratified, Sir, at your assumption of the presidency of the fifty-fourth session of the General Assembly. The unanimous election of a distinguished African diplomat such as yourself to this post is evidence of the conviction of the Member States of the Organization that, under your clear-sighted leadership, our work is certain to be successful. Your election is also a concrete expression of Secretary-General Kofi Annan's dedication to the cause of peace, as well as a recognition of Namibia's significant contribution to international peace-building. We pay tribute also to your predecessor, Mr. Didier Opertti, for the great sensitivity and skill he displayed in fulfilling his duties during the fifty-third session.

We would like also to express, on behalf of the people of Guinea-Bissau and on my own behalf, our gratitude to the Secretary-General, Mr. Kofi Annan, for his efforts towards international peace and security.

Guinea-Bissau also welcomes the new States Members of the United Nations — Kiribati, Nauru and Tonga — with which we intend to maintain relations of friendship and cooperation.

On the eve of the new millennium, Africa is experiencing an increase in armed conflict that threatens regional peace and stability. Regrettably, West Africa has not been spared this scourge. From the Liberian crisis to that of Sierra Leone, not to mention Guinea-Bissau, our region has been racked by periods of fratricidal violence whose causes are manifold.

In the case of our country, the root causes of the political and military crisis include a lack of effectiveness and a loss of authority on the part of the State; poor management; human rights violations; non-compliance with the principle of the separation of power between sovereign bodies; corruption and deteriorating living conditions; and total frustration and despair on the part of those who fought for freedom and their homeland.

The events of 7 June 1998 were a direct result of these problems. Unfortunately, as is the case in every conflict, the crisis also resulted in a tragic situation for the population that included the loss of life, a massive flow of refugees to neighbouring countries and large numbers of displaced persons, not to mention the devastation of the economic and social infrastructure of the country.

Having experienced the horrors of war, the people of Guinea-Bissau today more than ever strongly aspire to live in peace and security, with hope for the future and in the full enjoyment of their fundamental rights. Guinea-Bissau also wishes to consolidate its unity and to promote a culture of peace and national reconciliation that is based on a pluralist democracy with sound governance and on the rule of law.

We are determined to promote and protect the dignity of human beings and to enable their harmonious development. In this regard, we are pleased to note that a conference was convened recently in Guinea-Bissau for the reconciliation and unity of the people of our country. That event of rare scope raised the awareness of our fellow citizens and mobilized them with respect to national peace and reconciliation, which is a prerequisite for domestic security and socio-economic progress.

The conference also received direct support from, among others, Sweden, the Netherlands and the representative of the United Nations Secretary-General. All of Guinea-Bissau's vital elements participated, including political parties, non-governmental organizations, the Government, the military junta and our nationals living abroad.

We take this opportunity to affirm that we will spare no effort in working to consolidate the emerging democracy in Guinea-Bissau, basing ourselves on the social and cultural values of our people and on the principles of good relations as set out in the Charter of the United Nations and that of the Organization of African Unity, in order to bring about a lasting peace in our country.

In this context, we will be holding legislative and presidential elections on 28 November, preceded by a census and the registration of electoral candidates. We would like to reaffirm before the Assembly our determination to hold the elections as scheduled, despite the slow response time of some of our partners in development with respect to the commitments entered into at the round table held in Geneva on 4 and 5 May.

We would like also express our heartfelt thanks to Sweden, Portugal and the Netherlands for fulfilling their commitments in a timely manner.

We take this opportunity to launch an urgent appeal to the international community to support Guinea-Bissau in its efforts to return to constitutional order, which is a prerequisite for restoring normal relations of cooperation with its development partners.

It is also important to underscore our very positive relations with the peoples of the subregion, in particular with Senegal, and our desire to renew our fraternal ties of cooperation with the Republic of Guinea in order to help consolidate peace and stability in the subregion.

Despite the progress we have made in the struggle for human dignity and freedom, the vast majority of humankind lives in degrading conditions that are unacceptable to the collective conscience. This situation is the result of selfish interests that go against the moral and political values of the United Nations. The example of East Timor is a case in point.

With regard to East Timor, we are deeply concerned by the fact that after the popular consultation, whose outcome was favourable to the Maubere people, we witnessed very violent acts which were completely at odds with the agreement of 5 May between Indonesia,

Portugal and the United Nations. We express our fraternal solidarity with the heroic people of East Timor in the face of the genocide carried out by Indonesian militias. We condemn those acts and demand respect for the desire for self-determination expressed in the popular consultation of 30 August last. We welcome the strong — albeit late — reaction of the international community aimed at restoring peace and security in that territory. We appeal for efforts to be intensified and call for technical, material and financial aid for the rebuilding of East Timor, which has been brutally destroyed.

Guinea-Bissau supports the international community, the United Nations and the Organization of African Unity in their ceaseless search for a peaceful solution to the problems affecting our continent. In this context, the situation in Angola is of great concern for our country. The civil war has imposed great suffering on the majority of the population of Angola, especially those in the most vulnerable sectors. This situation requires vigorous action on the part of the international community to restore lasting peace in that neighbouring country. Guinea-Bissau demands that UNITA unconditionally abide by the Lusaka Protocol so as to put an end to this long and painful conflict in that fraternal country.

In the Middle East, the peace process between Israel and Palestine deserves our utmost attention. In this regard, we note with satisfaction the positive development in relations between Israel and Palestine under the impetus provided by the President of the Palestinian Authority, Yasser Arafat, and the Israeli Prime Minister, Ehud Barak.

In Latin America, we hope that the economic and trade embargo against Cuba will soon be lifted. We believe that the realism of the international community must prevail so as to spare the Cuban people the suffering that they continue to endure.

While it is true that peace and security are an indispensable condition for social and economic development, it is no less true that improving people's living conditions is one of the foundations of social and political stability. However, one of the obstacles to pursuing those objectives is our country's external debt. That is why the external debt burden is a matter of constant concern for Guinea-Bissau. In this context, we welcome the Heavily Indebted Poor Countries (HIPC) Debt Initiative. We also welcome the decisions taken at the G-7 summit recently held in Cologne.

We take this opportunity to pay a warm tribute to all the organizations in the United Nations system working in our country for their substantial contribution not only to consolidating national peace and reconciliation but to alleviating the suffering of our people. We also welcome the decision to appoint Mr. Samuel Nana-Sinkam as Special Representative of the Secretary-General to head the United Nations Peace-building Support Office in Guinea-Bissau, whose activities are greatly appreciated by our people.

We believe that we have made sufficiently clear our determination to hold elections on the scheduled date, 28 November 1999. However, we know that democracy does not end with elections. Support for the special emergency programme for Guinea-Bissau is therefore absolutely necessary in order to ensure that the democratic gains are irreversible and to give sustained development in our country a chance. That is why we take this opportunity to appeal once more to the international community not only to take an interest in the elections but also to support the determined efforts of Guinea-Bissau to build its future.

The President: On behalf of the General Assembly, I thank the President of the Republic of Guinea-Bissau for the statement he has just made.

Mr. Malam Bacai Sanha, President of the Republic of Guinea-Bissau, was escorted from the General Assembly Hall.

Agenda item 9 *(continued)*

General debate

The President: I now give the floor to the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade of New Zealand, His Excellency The Right Honourable Donald McKinnon.

Mr. McKinnon (New Zealand): First let me congratulate you, Sir, the Foreign Minister of Namibia, on your election as President of the General Assembly this session. I certainly recall my meetings with you and your President in your country last year.

I also wish to welcome three new Members to the United Nations — Kiribati, Nauru and Tonga — all very close friends and neighbours of New Zealand. I trust that the faith they have shown in the United Nations will be fulfilled in the years ahead, and we certainly look forward to working closely with them.

When addressing this Assembly, especially as a representative of a smaller Member State, one is reminded that the United Nations must remain the fundamental point of reference in international relations. Indeed, that is a truth that all Member States have an obligation to acknowledge. Furthermore, it is of course sound policy for all who need and rely on the rule of international law in place of lawlessness. And it is particularly important to restate it at this time. The United Nations collective security framework, which is one of the fundamental elements of the Charter together with cooperation on economic and social problems and promoting respect for human rights, has perhaps never been more severely tested than in this last year of the twentieth century.

Armed conflicts, many of them internal and ethnically based, have continued to present a serious moral challenge to the international community, and they are likely to do so for the foreseeable future. The Security Council's response to these problems does not always increase our confidence in the Organization.

The Secretary-General's remarks in his statement at the beginning of this debate about the need to reconcile universal legitimacy with effectiveness in defence of human rights were most timely. New Zealanders place a very good deal of faith in the United Nations: when we see on our television screens evidence of violence and inhumanity against the vulnerable, and we are told that the Security Council cannot reach an agreement on collective action, we are left worried, and wondering whether our trust in the Security Council is well placed. A Council which loses the trust of the people is a Council which will become irrelevant.

I want to talk to the Assembly about two extremely serious challenges the Council faced this year: Kosovo and East Timor. Both highlight the importance of the actions of the Security Council.

In East Timor, following President Habibie's courageous offer to the East Timorese people, prompt and effective action was taken by the Security Council to set in train the popular consultation process. The ballot — undertaken in extremely difficult circumstances by highly committed United Nations workers, international and local, all of whom deserve acclaim — produced a resounding and incontrovertible expression of the will of the East Timorese people. This was the essential basis for the international community's response since the ballot.

Post-ballot events were appallingly tragic and have rightly provoked a strong reaction around the world. The dispatch to Jakarta and Dili of the Security Council mission led by Ambassador Andjaba of Namibia was a key step in addressing this grievous situation. The efforts made by representatives of all countries present at the time of the meeting of Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation Council leaders in Auckland, joined by the British Foreign Secretary representing the European Union, reinforced the Secretary-General's urging that Indonesia accept the offer of international help. The assistance could not have come too early.

New Zealand is proud to be a contributor, alongside the forces of other nations from the region and from further afield, and under the leadership of Australia, to the United-Nations-authorized multinational force that is now operating in East Timor. Our soldiers from New Zealand are on the ground in East Timor right now. We are prepared also to take part in the United Nations peacekeeping operation foreshadowed in Security Council resolution 1264 (1999), and we urge the Council to take prompt action -- next week would not be too soon -- to establish this operation, which would be part of the United Nations transitional administration in East Timor. We are contributing to the efforts of humanitarian agencies to provide support to the hundreds of thousands of ordinary people who have been displaced in East Timor; those currently in West Timor should be speedily repatriated. New Zealand has added its voice to those who believe that the people responsible for crimes against humanity in East Timor should be brought to account. The overriding objective must now be to ensure the realization of the 30 August ballot outcome and East Timor's transition to independence. It is clear that in laying the basis for East Timor's future, the United Nations will be the indispensable organization.

It is inevitable that comparison will be made between East Timor and Kosovo. In Kosovo the world saw a grave humanitarian crisis with the Security Council unable to act. In New Zealand's view, collective action to try to put a stop to a humanitarian disaster involving genocide and the most serious crimes against humanity should never be held hostage to the veto. When it is, the Security Council loses its credibility and its relevance. I need hardly reiterate New Zealand's continuing opposition to the veto, voiced since San Francisco in 1945. While it is understandable that national interests will influence how members vote in the Security Council, we have never accepted that some narrow interests of any

one of five countries should be able to override the will of a clear majority of members.

The adoption by the Security Council of its resolution 1244 (1999) of 10 June, which provided the international community's endorsement of a political solution to the Kosovo conflict, was certainly greeted with much relief in most quarters, including in New Zealand. The resolution was proof, if any were needed, that the United Nations remains, as in East Timor, the indispensable organization. And as the Secretary-General observed at the time, it also gave strong legal underpinning to the task ahead, a task which, he noted, is daunting. The contribution of the dedicated United Nations and specialized agency staff who are now working with little fanfare in Kosovo certainly deserves our recognition.

Both Kosovo and East Timor have put the Security Council to the test. In their own ways they have challenged this Organization's capacity to take effective action in the face of severe difficulties. The world must never again witness horrors such as those in Kosovo whilst the Security Council remains impotent. The case of East Timor shows that the Security Council can react swiftly and effectively when the will exists. For this to be possible, the fullest commitment to support those humanitarian ideals that are the basis of the United Nations Charter remains essential.

The adoption of the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court shows such a commitment. The international community must now deliver on its promise, with signature and early ratification of that Statute.

As we know, the United Nations also has before it the pressing demands of the various and sometimes interrelated conflicts throughout Africa with, of course, their appalling humanitarian consequences. Who can put out of their minds the images of atrocities we have seen from Sierra Leone, for instance? Yet the Council's response has until very recently been low-level. Once again, the credibility of the Security Council depends in large part on its being seen as even-handed in its attention to crises, wherever they may occur, and whether the Cable News Network (CNN) is there or not.

For much of the past year we have seen the Council virtually paralysed on the important question of disarmaming Iraq of its weapons of mass destruction. In the meantime, this potentially very serious threat to the security of the region remains unresolved. The reason again has been the very sharp divisions among the permanent members, which by virtue of the veto power can block any action. This situation remains unacceptable.

New Zealand's awareness of the importance of the role of collective action has also been heightened by recent events in our own immediate region. Here, the United Nations demonstrated its ability to respond to the different demands of supporting the regionally inspired peace process on the island of Bougainville, part of Papua New Guinea, and of assessing the needs created by disruptions to the population on Guadalcanal in the Solomon Islands.

The United Nations must be capable of responding effectively. Small and vulnerable nations in particular need confidence in the United Nations, as it may be their only hope in times of trouble. I am very concerned therefore by the apparent trend away from financing new peacekeeping operations by means of assessed contributions and an increasing reliance instead on voluntary funding. This, of course, poses a threat to the collective responsibility that is at the heart of this Organization. In practical terms it is likely to mean that those regions which fail to attract donor support will not receive the response they are entitled to as Members of the United Nations. This trend must be urgently reversed; all operations must be put on an equal financial footing by means of assessed contributions.

In addition, as I noted here last year, the largest contributor's arrears to the peacekeeping and regular budgets continue to cast a long shadow over the Organization. Outstanding dues and very slow payments to troop contributors affect us all, and can severely constrain the ability of countries to contribute to pressing peacekeeping needs. We call again on those Member States who are in dereliction of their obligations to make payment on time, in full and, of course, without conditions.

Reform of the Security Council remains one of the most important items on our agenda. Further useful progress has been made this year. While the issue of enlargement continues to be complex, we believe there has existed for some time wide agreement on the equally important areas of reforming the Council's working methods and the curtailing of the veto. The linkage between the veto and enlargement was also explicitly recognized in this year's report to the General Assembly of the Open-ended Working Group on the Question of Equitable Representation on and Increase in the

Membership of the Security Council and Other Matters Related to the Security Council.

As for the task of providing more equitable representation, I am not convinced that we will be able to achieve this while the regional groups in the United Nations continue to reflect the political geography of the 1960s. Quite different and far more sensible arrangements have been adopted in other multilateral forums, as, for example, in the context of the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty (CTBT). The present system here in New York locks in very great disparities in representation. Small countries that can make an excellent contribution are often severely disadvantaged, especially where a political bloc inside a regional group may coordinate closely on electoral matters.

I would, therefore, wish to add my voice to those of the Prime Ministers of Fiji and Samoa and the Foreign Ministers of Papua New Guinea and Australia, who spoke earlier in this debate on the need for reconfiguration. Reconfiguration of the regional groups may well hold one of the keys to an overall package on Security Council reform.

New Zealand still looks forward to the day when we can join a regional group here in New York which includes our Asia-Pacific neighbours. In the meantime, we will continue to build linkages in our region and developing the many areas of our common understanding.

One of the great strengths of the General Assembly is the equal status ascribed to each Member. All Members, large or small, rich or poor, have a right to be heard here. Each has a single vote. While we must all from time to time temper our own national ambitions in the interests of reaching a common understanding, we respect the point of view of each individual member. The special session on small island developing States over the last few days was a very good opportunity to do just that. New Zealand is firmly committed to assisting the small island developing States SIDS in the spirit of common purpose and partnership envisaged at Barbados five years ago. We are very pleased that all participants in the special session have reaffirmed their commitment to implement fully the Barbados Programme of Action.

In April New Zealand, represented by my colleague, the Honourable Simon Upton, had the privilege of chairing the seventh session of the Commission on Sustainable Development. We were pleased to be able to help reinvigorate debate and build consensus around the need for a more coordinated approach to stewardship of the world's oceans and the need to recognise, in an ongoing way, the special characteristics and needs of small island developing States.

The Commission faces the great challenge of pursuing the implementation of Agenda 21. Two other great challenges we as a world face on the environmental front are the threat of global climate change, caused at least in part by human-induced emissions of greenhouse gases, and the need to maintain an approach to international trade and environmental issues which is based on sound scientific analysis and agreed rules and procedures. It is vitally important that we should continue to act in concert to face these international challenges.

International cooperation in addressing economic, social and humanitarian problems is, and always will be, one of the cornerstones of the United Nations Charter. The substantial decline in official development assistance flows over the last decade is of great concern to many Member States. In this connection, I am concerned to note that the core resources of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) have been greatly reduced over the past five years, to the point where its universality is seriously threatened. I applaud the efforts the new administrator is making to turn this situation around and to put UNDP on a more secure footing, with more clearly defined priorities.

Private capital flows to developing countries have shown major increases. There is a tendency, however, for such investment to be heavily concentrated on a few countries where investment prospects seem brightest. Many developing countries remain vulnerable and can be all too easily marginalized. Official development assistance continues to be an essential tool to help build the capacity of countries in sectors such as education so that they can benefit from the unstoppable phenomenon of globalization. It is certainly a matter of particular pride for me, as New Zealand's Foreign Minister, to have overseen increases in New Zealand's official development assistance funding effort — up by some 40 per cent since the time of the Rio Summit in 1992.

I welcome, also, the positive steps that are being taken on the financing for development and debt-relief initiatives. It is vital that we continue the dialogue among Member States and with the international financial institutions to ensure a sounder basis for meeting the challenges of international development.

Last year I referred to the important role the United Nations has to play in shaping the moves towards globalization and the opening up of opportunities for world trade. Later this year, in Seattle, we expect to launch a new round of multilateral trade negotiations. This will clearly provide a forum in which to advance trade liberalization and the rules-based trading system. The role of these negotiations in promoting the development prospects of all countries and in fostering the integration of least developed countries into the global system will be a particular focus. Deliberations in this Organization at many levels will help to advance our people's understanding of the value and purpose of the global trade agenda and their ability to benefit from it. However, I would emphasise the importance of major trading partners in continuing to play a leadership role. The adoption of trade restrictions and distortions by wealthy economies does much to erode their moral authority in the broader debate.

New Zealand continues to attach the utmost importance to seeing all countries work together to bring about a world free of nuclear weapons. For this reason we were a cosponsor last year of the so-called New Agenda resolution, which called for faster progress towards the elimination of nuclear weapons. The cosponsors will be presenting this moderate resolution again this year, and we urge all countries to look carefully at it.

The Conference on Facilitating the Entry into Force of the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty will meet in Vienna in a week's time. I would urge all those countries which have not ratified the Treaty to do so, so that it can enter into force without further delay.

Strengthening the United Nations remains an important goal for New Zealand. I take this opportunity to commend the forward-looking management reforms introduced by the Secretary-General. They have greatly improved policy coordination among senior management and have produced positive, tangible effects throughout the Secretariat. Improving the way the Organization plans its programmes and expenditures is a critical next step, where work is already under way. There must be a greater focus on results when budgets are prepared in order to promote the best use of the resources of the Organization, and in turn the best return for Member States.

This year marks the fiftieth anniversary of the Geneva Conventions, and last year we commemorated the fiftieth anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Events over the past 12 months have shown that challenges to the values and principles embodied in the Universal Declaration remain as daunting as ever. In this interdependent world in which we live, New Zealand continues to see the United Nations as central to international efforts to work together to protect and promote, for all our people, those fundamental human rights and freedoms to which we are committed under the Universal Declaration.

Next year the United Nations will host the millennium summit. This symbolic event will provide an excellent opportunity for Member States to reaffirm their commitment to the ideals of this great Organization. Recognizing the frailties of our collective performance to date, and the critical importance of finding workable solutions for the future, I call on all Member States to take the opportunities offered by the millennium summit to enter into open and constructive dialogue and step into the next millennium with an unequivocal recommitment to the visionary principles enshrined in the Charter.

It is nine years since I first addressed this body in 1991 as the Foreign Minister of New Zealand. For the United Nations, and particularly the Security Council, it has been a tumultuous period. After the cold war the number of problems multiplied; the world's expectations of what the United Nations could deliver were raised above the possible; and the solutions demanded required determination, resolve, tact, understanding and imagination. The demands on the United Nations will not lessen, but each year must see a better performance than in the past. However, as this may well be the last statement I make to this body, I want to thank all United Nations officials and peacekeepers everywhere: those I have met here in New York; in Cambodia and in Somalia; in Mozambique; in Bosnia, Croatia and Albania; in Papua New Guinea and, of course, now in East Timor. I thank them for their continuing, often unsung and heroic efforts. They are much appreciated.

The President: I now call on the Minister for Foreign Affairs of Tunisia, His Excellency Mr. Saïd Ben Mustapha.

Mr. Ben Mustapha (Tunisia) (*spoke in Arabic*): I would like first of all to extend to you, Sir, my warmest congratulations on your election as President of the General Assembly at its fifty-fourth session. I have no doubt that your long diplomatic experience and your deep knowledge of international relations will enable you to guide the work of this session to a successful conclusion. Your election is a token of appreciation from the international community to you personally and to your

country, Namibia, which is noted for its prestige in Africa and in the world. Tunisia, which stood by the fraternal Namibian people in their successful struggle against colonialism, is proud of its close ties with your country and looks forward to strengthening and developing them further in the interests of our two countries and peoples.

Allow me to take this opportunity to express our sincere gratitude to your predecessor, Mr. Didier Opertti, for his valuable efforts during his presidency of the fifty-third Assembly and for the wise manner in which he conducted its work, which had a very positive impact on the deliberations.

I take this opportunity also to express to the Secretary-General our great appreciation for his relentless efforts in promoting and strengthening the pacific, negotiated settlement of disputes and crises in various parts of the world. We commend him for his dedication to enhancing the effectiveness and efficiency of the Secretariat and to strengthening the Organization's role in meeting humankind's desire for progress, security and peace.

I extend Tunisia's congratulations to the Republic of Nauru, the Republic of Kiribati and the Kingdom of Tonga on their admission to our Organization.

What characterizes this session is that it is being held at the close of a decade that began with the prospect of an end to the cold war, witnessed the emergence of new concepts and future-oriented visions designed to avoid any repeat of past errors and crises, and aimed to establish a new world order based on security, peace, cooperation and stability. Although optimism marked the early stages of this new era, subsequent developments have compelled the international community to conduct a comprehensive review of the immediate past in order to solve the various difficulties and problems of our world today.

As we meet during this session at the dawn of the twenty-first century, we have a propitious opportunity to discuss and exchange views about various possible methods for amending the approach that we have taken over the last few years and identifying its weaknesses and deficiencies. We must then devise a renewed approach that will provide future generations with the capacity to adapt, overcome obstacles, preserve international peace and security and ensure well-being and prosperity for all humanity.

For the framework of such a renewed approach to maintaining international peace and security, we have in mind three main themes. First, the change that has taken place in the approach to armaments and to their role in the world. Secondly, the growing need for increased attention to settling regional disputes. Thirdly, the transformation of economic and social development into one of the cornerstones of peace and security globally. Despite the great strides which the international community has made in these three areas, much remains to be done before we achieve the goal of a qualitative transition that would allow us to guarantee security and tranquillity for all people and for the generations to come.

Our world possesses huge arsenals of weapons, especially weapons of mass destruction, nuclear weapons foremost among them. It is extremely important, in our view, for the nuclear Powers to take rapid steps to eliminate these weapons, especially given the limits of the current non-proliferation regime in the long term and the impossibility of contemplating non-proliferation as a substitute for completely dismantling and destroying all nuclear weapons and banning them in the future.

We believe that as we move closer to the twenty-first century, the international community has a historic opportunity to achieve this noble goal or at least to conclude an agreement on nuclear disarmament. In working towards this goal, it is extremely important to ensure that non-nuclear weapon States are not subject to the use or threat of use of nuclear weapons in violation of their security and territorial integrity. Consideration must be given to the fact that non-nuclear-weapon States constitute the overwhelming majority of Member States and have freely chosen not to possess nuclear weapons.

We would like, in this regard, to address another aspect of disarmament: small arms. We all know how destructive small arms can be. Tunisia supports all international efforts to curb small arms proliferation and trafficking.

Tunisia, which has abided by all disarmament treaties and conventions, reiterates its total commitment to the disarmament objectives and its strong resolve to continue contributing towards the achievement of these goals in the various relevant fora, especially the Conference on Disarmament in Geneva. Tunisia recently had the honour of joining the Conference, following the Conference's decision last August to expand its membership by admitting five new countries.

In implementation of the Ottawa Convention on the Prohibition of the Use, Stockpiling, Production and

Transfer of Anti-personnel Mines and on Their Destruction, Tunisia destroyed large quantities of mines during an official ceremony on 29 June 1999 attended by a representative of the United Nations in Tunis. We hope that all States parties to the Convention will participate in the Convention process without delay so that the Convention's objectives are achieved and transparency is promoted pursuant to the Convention's article 7.

The outbreak and persistence of conflicts in many parts of the world compel our Organization to be constantly ready to assume its responsibilities and to play the role it has been assigned in this regard by the Charter. We believe that the efforts aimed at consolidating preventive diplomacy, collective security, the peaceful settlement of disputes and adherence to international legality are foundations of international peace and security and should be further upheld.

However, despite the numerous successes of our Organization in this field, there are still many hotbeds of tension and war that require more coordination and cooperation if they are to be curbed and prevented from spreading. I should like in this regard to address the question of so-called "humanitarian intervention". This is a sensitive and delicate issue. It requires, in our view, a thorough and profound analysis taking into account all its aspects, especially those related, first, to the sovereignty of States and the need to preserve it as a natural right enshrined in the Charter of the United Nations as a fundamental element of international relations; and, secondly, the necessity to save the lives of civilian populations in times of conflict, in accordance with the principle of international solidarity.

All States Members of the Organization are called upon to consider all the implications of these principles in order to reach consensus on this issue and to contribute in a considered and balanced way to the debate on it. Such a debate should not be confined to the Security Council, but should also involve the General Assembly.

The issues related to the security problems confronting the African continent should remain at the top of our priorities. These issues need the strong material and financial support of the international community if they are to be resolved. Africa, in turn, has given top priority to the question of the settlement of internal disputes. The Organization of African Unity Mechanism for Conflict Prevention, Management and Resolution has played an important role in this regard. Since its inception, the Mechanism has achieved encouraging results that reflect the determination of African countries to rely, first and foremost, on their own capacity to solve the problems that threaten the security of the continent, in full coordination with the United Nations. Given its importance, the Mechanism needs stronger financial and technical support from the international community, which would help to enhance its capacities and to develop its effectiveness and efficiency.

We must stress in this regard the extreme importance of development, a basic guarantor of lasting security. Indeed, there can be no stability without sustainable development. Despite the relentless efforts of African countries in the political, economic and social fields aimed at improving the situation of their peoples, there are still many difficulties that prevent many countries from implementing their development programmes.

It has become a matter of urgency that the African continent receive strong and continuous support on the basis of its national priorities. We note in this regard that the initiative of the Security Council and the General Assembly to convene meetings to discuss and follow up the situation in Africa bears testimony to a growing and consolidated awareness of the need to address African problems. While commending this approach, we must emphasize the need to adopt practical plans which Africa's partners can translate into concrete realities in an effective manner.

Mr. Rodríguez Parrilla (Cuba), Vice-President, took the Chair.

We commend the various initiatives of the United Nations, its specialized agencies and the Bretton Woods institutions to promote sustainable development in Africa. We believe, however, that it is important to ensure coordination between United Nations initiatives and those undertaken by donor countries if such initiatives are to succeed. In this framework, we look forward to the adoption of practical initiatives that respond to the proposals spelt out in the report of the Secretary-General on the causes of conflict and the promotion of sustainable peace and development in Africa, particularly regarding the debt problem.

In Tunisia, we are aware of the important role that economic and geographical groupings play in today's world in addressing the challenges posed by globalization and in adapting to constant important changes. This awareness prompts us to pursue our endeavours, along

with our brothers in the Maghreb countries, to complete the establishment of the Arab Maghreb Union, which remains a strategic and firm choice and which also represents the aspirations of the people of our region to prosperity, security and integration. This choice is even more pressing in the light of our country's endeavours to set up a Euro-Mediterranean space as a framework for cooperation between all Mediterranean countries, for solidarity between its peoples and for a cultural and social dialogue on the basis of the noble values and high principles in which we all believe.

With respect to the Middle East, where the conflict has lasted more than half a century, peace, which is cherished by the peoples of that region and indeed by the whole world, still faces difficulties despite the efforts that have been made by the international community, particularly since the early 1970s. There is no doubt that a comprehensive, just and lasting peace is the only way to consolidate the foundations of stability and security and to enable all parties to devote their resources and energies to the development efforts of their countries and to ensuring the well-being of their peoples.

Tunisia has followed with satisfaction the new developments brought about by the signing of the Sharm el-Sheikh Memorandum, which has created a new encouraging climate for the reactivation of the peace process and the faithful and full implementation of all agreements and commitments. We hope that the final status negotiations will lead to the resolution of the most important issues, particularly the recognition of the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people, in particular its right to establish an independent State on its land, with Jerusalem as its capital.

On the basis of this firm position of principle in support of the peace process, and eager as it is to see the peace process succeed on all tracks, Tunisia insists on the importance of reactivating negotiations on the Syrian and Lebanese tracks from the point at which they stopped, as well as on the necessity of the complete and unconditional withdrawal of Israel from South Lebanon and from the Syrian Golan Heights, in compliance with the relevant United Nations resolutions and on the basis of the principle of land for peace. Occupation and peace cannot co-exist.

Regarding the Lockerbie issue, Tunisia expresses its satisfaction at the recent positive developments, to which it and other parties of good will contributed. It also reiterates its call for a speedy and final lifting of the embargo imposed on the brotherly Libyan people.

With respect to the question of Iraq, Tunisia reiterates its call for a peaceful solution in the context of international resolutions. It also calls upon the international community to join efforts to put an end to the suffering of the Iraqi people so that all the efforts of the peoples of that region can be directed towards development and the promotion of stability. Thus, Tunisia, which has called for respect for international legality, expresses the hope that a solution will soon be found to all the humanitarian issues resulting from this tragedy, particularly the question of Kuwaiti prisoners of war and missing persons, in conformity with the relevant Security Council resolutions.

Regarding the question of the three islands of Greater Tunb, Lesser Tunb and Abu Musa, Tunisia reiterates its support for the resolution of this dispute between the United Arab Emirates and Iran through peaceful means, either through direct dialogue or, if that should prove impossible, by referring the question to the International Court of Justice.

In another region of the world, the international community has focused its attention in recent months on another important question, that of East Timor. In this regard, we welcome the adoption of Security Council resolution 1264 (1999) and hope that its implementation will enable the people of East Timor to achieve self-determination and will, at the same time, maintain security in the region and preserve the sovereignty and integrity of Indonesia. We commend Indonesia's courage in responding to the wishes of the people of East Timor and the international community. We believe that a final settlement of this issue can be achieved only in an atmosphere of conciliation that involves all parties concerned, and with the support and blessing of the international community.

One of the most important phenomena characterizing the end of this century is the growing globalization that now dominates various aspects of our social life. Although it has created new opportunities in the field of economic development, it is likely, if not brought under control, to lead to further disruption of international relations and development plans. The international community must seriously and firmly address the challenges posed by globalization. This entails the demonstration of stronger political will from all parties and the implementation of all the commitments made, particularly at the important conferences of the United Nations.

Follow-up and implementation of the recommendations of international conferences is, in our opinion, of great importance. In this regard, we would like to express our satisfaction with the continuing work of the preparatory Committees for the two special sessions of the General Assembly to review and appraise implementation of the Beijing Platform of Action dealing with women's and family issues and of the Copenhagen World Summit for Social Development, which will be held in June, in New York and Geneva respectively. However, we note with concern that, despite the efforts made at the United Nations, which has placed the eradication of poverty high on its agenda, the agreed target set at the Copenhagen Summit for increasing the amount of official development assistance to 0.7 per cent of the gross national product of developed countries has not yet been met.

This situation requires action at the international level aimed at achieving solidarity, which we consider an essential link between peoples. In this context we place the recent call by His Excellency Mr. Zine El Abidine Ben Ali, President of the Republic of Tunisia, to all world leaders and to various United Nations and other international institutions for the creation of a world solidarity fund. The objective of this fund would be to collect voluntary donations and contributions to be used in the fight against poverty and in the development of the poorest regions in various parts of the world, particularly in the least developed countries that undergo various tragedies and crises. Our country will endeavour, through its contacts with brotherly and friendly countries and at the United Nations and other international organizations, to rally the necessary support for this noble humanitarian project and for the elaboration of modalities for its creation as soon as possible. This will enable us to be more responsive to our options and commitments, which have gained the acceptance of the international community and which have been set forth in the recommendations of various international conferences.

We also rely on United Nations institutions, such as the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), the World Health Organization (WHO), the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) and other institutions in view of their prestige and experience as well as their interest in the fight against poverty, to contribute efficiently to the speedy creation of this fund.

The year 1999 represents a new landmark in the consolidation of the democratic process in Tunisia. It will be marked by pluralistic presidential and parliamentary elections based on full transparency and freedom of choice for citizens within the context of freedom and respect for law. Tunisia has undertaken a programme of substantial reforms over the past 12 years in different areas, having amended the Constitution, allowing political pluralism and a multiparty system, eliminating special courts and enacting legislation in conformity with our obligations to international treaties in the field of human rights, which Tunisia has been among the first countries to ratify.

In the same spirit, Tunisia has long undertaken to promote women's freedom and gender equality. It publishes a special journal on children's rights and a code on the care and rights of the elderly, handicapped and other vulnerable categories. All these reforms embody Tunisia's global vision regarding all dimensions of human rights and confirm our country's strong belief in the universality of such principles.

The creation of many multilateral organizations, particularly the United Nations, represents the most important achievement of the international community in this century. Thanks to the solid institutional edifice in which our Organization holds a privileged place, rules regulating relations between States have been codified, and common objectives, programmes and strategies have been elaborated in order to address the problems confronting the world.

Despite the successes and achievements in this regard, certain weaknesses still mark international relations, and various new disruptions and dangers have emerged. In the context of all the developments and changes that have occurred, the United Nations remains the ideal forum and haven for the elaboration of collective strategies to overcome challenges.

We believe that the millennium summit, to be held during the fifty-fifth session of the General Assembly, constitutes an ideal opportunity, which the international community should fully utilize, evaluate its accomplishments and build a strategy based on them in order to usher in the new millennium with diligence and confidence. That summit will also be a historic occasion for heads of State and Government to debate this matter.

In this regard, we believe that the Organization needs to be provided with all the necessary means to play an effective role in international relations and affairs. Reforming the Organization and its various structures on

the basis of the developments and changes that have occurred will certainly ensure its vitality. Among the urgent tasks that the Member States need to address today is to reform the Security Council in a way that would reflect the profound changes the international community has witnessed, ensure global representation in this vital body and consolidate the principles of transparency and democracy in its working methods.

We need to stress, in this context, that we expect the reform of the Security Council to lead to the fulfilment of the requests of developing countries, primarily African countries, to have permanent representation on the Security Council, which would allow them to contribute to the tasks and responsibilities assigned to this body in the maintenance of international peace and security.

In conclusion, I would like to reiterate the full commitment of Tunisia to the purposes and principles of the United Nations as enshrined in the Charter, the same purposes and principles it has adopted and implemented in its foreign policy. Tunisia is a peace-loving and justice-loving nation. It has endeavoured relentlessly since its admission to this body, and in all the forums to which it belongs, to contribute with all the means at its disposal to strengthen the foundations of international peace and security. It makes every effort to encourage dialogue and negotiations as the proper means for the settlement of disputes and crises. It has participated in United Nations peacekeeping operations since the early 1960s and presently contributes to three of them. Last June Tunisia signed with the United Nations an agreement that would place standby forces at the disposal of the Organization.

Tunisia spares no effort in contributing to all initiatives aimed at promoting cooperation, solidarity and understanding between countries and peoples. That is the direction we have freely chosen and that we intend to pursue if and when my country is given the honour of being elected to a non-permanent seat on the Security Council for the period 2000-2001 by the Member States and with the full support of the brotherly African Group, other groups and friendly countries. We look forward to the support of all Member States so that my country can continue working with them towards fulfilling the task of advancing the purposes and principles of the Charter.

The Acting President (*spoke in Spanish*): I call on the Minister for Foreign Affairs of Armenia, His Excellency Mr. Vartan Oskanian.

Mr. Oskanian (Armenia): May I begin by congratulating the President on his election. I am confident that the skills and vast experience he has acquired throughout his distinguished diplomatic career will provide the guidance we need to guarantee the successful outcome of the session. I must also recall the valuable contribution of his predecessor, Mr. Opertti, to the work of the last session of the General Assembly.

I would like to take this opportunity to extend my warm welcome and congratulations to the Republic of Kiribati, the Republic of Nauru and the Kingdom of Tonga on their admission to the United Nations.

As the twentieth century comes to an end, it is evident that all countries in the world — advanced, developing or transitional — will be substantially affected by globalization. Further specialization and the widening of markets through trade, the larger division of labour and a more efficient and diversified allocation of financial resources should increase overall productivity and raise living standards. However, no country will benefit from this trend spontaneously and automatically. The major tasks which Governments face today are development and the pursuit of sound policies and appropriate structural adjustments to meet the challenges and take advantage of the opportunities that globalization offers. While sound domestic economic planning and reforms are critical to meeting the challenges of globalization, regional cooperation and integration processes are essential to maximizing the emerging benefits and opportunities.

We, as a country and the region as a whole, are trying to adjust to the multiple stresses of post-Soviet economic, cultural and political transformations. Clearly these problems can stress relations as much within States as between them. Armenia does not see either itself or the region as being permanently condemned to marginalization; rather, it believes that close cooperation in the region, whether political, economic or security based, will help bring lasting stability and prosperity based on a sense of solid and shared emergent values. Cooperation within the framework of regional economic initiatives, such as the Interstate Oil and Gas Transport to Europe (INOGATE) programme and the Transport Corridor: Europe-Caucusus-Asia (TRACECA) project, is essential. Armenia is sincerely open to such cooperation, although we have to state with regret that the blockades imposed on Armenia by Turkey and Azerbaijan are a serious obstacle to such cooperation. It is obvious that the region's high potential cannot be fully utilized if attempts are made to isolate one of its constituents. Such attempts

are doomed to failure and will adversely affect all concerned in the region.

The Black Sea Economic Cooperation (BSEC) is another mechanism that could contribute to the region's economic development. The activities of the recently established Black Sea Trade and Development Bank will considerably contribute to carrying out the projects elaborated by the member States of the Black Sea Economic Cooperation. In this regard, Armenia fully supports the granting of observer status in the General Assembly to the BSEC.

A young republic in transition from a long nightmare of totalitarian, single-party State to the emergence of a democratic, free-market, open society, Armenia must simultaneously consolidate its State structures, move its economy forward and resolve the Nagorny Karabakh conflict. It must do all three at the same time, for they are in fact interdependent. First and foremost, Armenia must ensure that the Armenian population of Nagorny Karabakh continues to enjoy its security within its own lands. Our recent memories of vulnerability and insecurity make it impossible for any Armenian anywhere to accept anything less than the inalienable right of the people of Nagorny Karabakh not to be subjugated, not to be dominated and not to be subordinate. Armenia understands this and is actively engaged in pursuing in every possible forum a resolution of the conflict with Azerbaijan that would achieve peace without endangering the hard-won and legitimate rights of our own people to live in secure dignity and freedom.

Since 1992 the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) has played a key role in the process of finding a peaceful solution to the conflict in Nagorny Karabakh. It has been actively involved, through the various permutations of the Minsk process, to define the elements for a durable peace and stability in the region of the Transcaucasus. Armenia is committed to pursuing every possible and credible attempt to resolve the conflicts that linger in the region. It is committed to exploring every avenue for peaceful relations with all its neighbours, relations based on mutual respect and recognition.

The OSCE, through the Co-Chairmen of the Minsk Group, is trying to reconcile seemingly incompatible principles. We have always remained opposed to one-sided orthodoxy and have always advocated a more flexible approach. It is therefore with interest that Armenia and Nagorny Karabakh received the Minsk Group Co-Chairmen's draft proposal during their latest visit to the region. My Government, as well as the authorities of Nagorny Karabakh, considered this formulation by the Co-Chairmen a more realistic effort in trying to address the thorny issue of the status of Nagorny Karabakh with minimal prejudice to either of the competing claims.

Indeed, we must distinguish between stability and the forced maintenance of the status quo. Conflating the two is neither wise nor practicable in the long run. A status quo in political life is never inherently permanent, and a viable policy of stability requires a mechanism to pursue an evolutionary, dynamic process of managing change. We have new and dynamic challenges to the status quo; we should not be shy in addressing these challenges creatively and objectively to conceive more adaptive answers rather than falling back into a comfortable, yet dangerously elusive, status quo.

As Armenia actively defends and pursues the Nagorny Karabakh people's right to self-determination through peaceful means, we also sympathize with and support all other just self-determination claims in other parts of the globe. Armenia applauded the Indonesian Government's courage when it announced the conduct of the referendum on East Timor's independence. Today we are concerned with the latest developments, but we hope that the results of the popular consultation will be fully respected. We also commend the role that the United Nations has played in organizing and supervising the popular consultation.

Armenia also welcomes the most recent positive developments in the Middle East peace process. We hope that the Palestinian people's right to self-determination will be fully realized, thus bringing lasting peace and stability to the Middle East.

The last decade of the twentieth century has been marked by serious achievements in the sphere of disarmament and global and regional arms control, and more remains to be done. At the global level, that would mean reviewing the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT) in the year 2000; completing the work of the Biological Weapons Convention Ad Hoc Group on a compliance and verification protocol; completely eliminating existing stocks of chemical weapons and ensuring the universality of the Chemical Weapons Convention regime. Similarly, at the regional level, we attach great importance to the successful conclusion of the Treaty on Conventional Armed Forces in Europe (CFE) adaptation process, which will be signed by heads of States at the OSCE summit this November.

We are convinced that the adapted Treaty will significantly contribute to the strengthening of European security.

In pursuing its national policies, Armenia has made it a priority to support the international efforts in securing peace and stability throughout the world. We believe that our full participation in the work of the Conference on Disarmament will allow us to make further contributions to the issues of arms control and disarmament. We hope members will support Armenia in its willingness to become a full member of the Conference on Disarmament.

Armenia welcomes the millennium summit initiative. At the threshold of the new millennium, it is important for heads of State and Government to discuss the tasks that the United Nations is going to undertake in providing global peace and security. Believing that the United Nations should play the leading role in the formation of an international anti-criminal strategy, Armenia supports the idea of holding, in Vienna in the year 2000, the Tenth United Nations Congress on Crime Prevention and the Treatment of Offenders.

We call for the accession of the maximum number of countries to universal conventions against terrorism and support the Russian proposal on a United Nations convention for combating acts of nuclear terrorism. Armenia, likewise, supports the initiative of holding a conference or a special session of the General Assembly against terrorism in 2000.

On 1 October, Armenia will sign the Statute of the International Criminal Court, thus becoming the eighty-seventh State to do so.

Maintenance of international peace is one of the most important functions of the United Nations. The challenges that the international community faces today are diverse and complicated. This holds true especially for the reform of the Security Council, since ensuring peace and security throughout the world depends on a Security Council which functions effectively. Security Council resolutions, including those on peacekeeping operations, should be unbiased and universal and reflect a common approach to conflicts, based on internationally accepted principles and criteria. One way to strengthen the role and function of the Security Council is to ensure a more equitable representation of the membership of the United Nations in that organ, in accordance with the sovereign equality of States and other relevant provisions of the Charter, and to make its work more transparent. Representation in the Security Council that is more equitable can be achieved by increasing the number of its members, taking into account the growth in the membership of the United Nations.

After this brief comment on matters that concern Armenia's current affairs, its membership in the United Nations and the outstanding issues of the Nagorny Karabakh conflict, allow me a moment of reflection. We are often so preoccupied by immediate crises that lingering, chronic and fundamental phenomena do not always get our full attention.

At this end of the century and millennium and on the threshold of a new era, we would not be candid if we did not admit to a certain disappointment, a certain sad recognition that we, as a collectivity, a community of nations, have not come as far as people everywhere would have wished us to come. I am sure we are not alone in our disappointment as we look around us and see that the hopes of 1989 have not been fully realized in the last 10 years: Rwanda, Kosovo and East Timor are all, historically speaking, very much in the present.

It is not for lack of charters, conventions and universal declarations that tragic events and murderous actions are committed, often by States, and even in the name of those same charters, conventions and declarations. After the Second World War, after the end of the cold war, we might have been justified in expecting some respite from the organized display of man's inhumanity to man, of fratricidal war between citizens and State attempts to exterminate some part of its own people. But of course very recent experience tells us that the persecution of innocent civilians on no other grounds than their ethnicity, religion or national origin continues unabated.

Armenia and Armenians have a unique history through which to interpret these events. We notice the ever more frequent use of the term "genocide" in continent after continent and we are reminded of our own tragic experience as genocide victims at the beginning of this century. It is sad but true that the genocide of Armenians, which began in 1915, opened this century of horrors. We at least are convinced that nothing contributes as much to the repetition of horrors as the reluctance and unwillingness with which those complicit in them tell the truth, or even their avoiding doing so at all. Denying the reality of evil, portraying it as merely relative and rendering it banal have done much to have evil seen as a political event to manipulate and equivocate and prevaricate about in the name of realpolitik.

In Armenia, our democracy and future prosperity depend on there coming a time when, through peace, the Caucasus will fulfil its promise as a region of neighbourly cooperation and economic growth. Without regional political stability, the regional economic prospects for all countries of the Caucasus will remain precarious. And unless the security needs and the aspirations of the people of the region are satisfied, there can be no political stability.

The Acting President (*spoke in Spanish*): I now call on the Minister of State and Minister for Foreign Affairs, Cooperation and Francophonie of Gabon, His Excellency Mr. Jean Ping.

Mr. Ping (*spoke in French*): I am pleased to convey to the President on behalf of the delegation of Gabon, our warmest congratulations on his well-deserved election to the presidency of the General Assembly at its fifty-fourth session. In addition to the tribute his election pays to Namibia, it is eloquent testimony to both his personal and professional qualities. We hardly need to point out that he was one of the principal architects of Namibia's independence. Today, the President has the honour of presiding over the last Assembly session of the century and of leading the United Nations towards the new millennium. Allow me through you to assure him of my delegation's complete and wholehearted cooperation.

To his predecessor, Mr. Didier Opertti, Minister for Foreign Affairs of Uruguay, I extend my deepest gratitude for the work accomplished during his term of office.

I congratulate the Secretary-General for his initiatives and actions towards peace and security worldwide.

To the three new Member States, the Republic of Kiribati, the Republic of Nauru and the Kingdom of Tonga, which have just joined the great United Nations family, I convey my warmest congratulations.

I am convinced that this session will enable us to share our thoughts on the increasingly complex challenges that our Organization must face if it is to create the necessary conditions for the maintenance of international peace and security and for economic and social development.

We are entering a major period of transition marked by the end of one century and the beginning of another, so it is beyond necessary for the international community to see to it that the new millennium is spared the scourges that sap humankind's strength.

During this century that is now coming to its end, the world has undergone a rapid acceleration in the pace of history and a thorough transformation as a result of combined effects of the explosion in the numbers of new technologies, the expansion of trade and the breathtaking increase in the role played by markets. The scale of this transformation, which affects all aspects of people's lives, is today so great that no nation can escape its influence.

Unfortunately, nations are not all in the same boat: some steadily accumulate progress and prosperity while others seem destined to a bottomless pit of destitution. I am thinking here specifically about the African countries which, unlike the rest of the world, have not yet taken advantage of the profound changes in the world, and whose access to the so often trumpeted shared prosperity is denied. I am thinking also about one and a half billion men and women around the world who live on less than a dollar a day, and the billion adults who can neither read nor write. I am thinking too about the 300 million Africans who eke out their lives in a state of abject poverty on the outer margins of the global village.

Add to this bleak picture the heavy burden of debt, which is strangling our economies, compromising any attempt at development and reducing us to the level of modern-day slaves at the tender mercy of our creditors.

The budgetary resources allocated to service external debt overwhelm all efforts to meet the most basic needs of our people. It is therefore crucial that the recurring problem of debt should be considered not only in terms of socio-economic indicators but also taking into account a State's efforts to combat poverty.

While welcoming the recent initiative undertaken at Cologne by the Group of Seven and Russia with a view to cancelling the debt of the most heavily indebted countries, the Government of Gabon is nevertheless disappointed by the fact that the eligibility criteria for those countries are so restrictive; for it must be recalled that debt, like poverty, is a constant threat to the stability

of States. Therefore, the burning question of global proportions that we must all face is how to take advantage, both individually and collectively, of the current prodigious global prosperity and the enormous accumulation of wealth created by globalization in order to substantially reduce the poverty of nations and of their people.

As the Minister Fischer of Germany said recently,

> "Africa must not be a loser in globalization. The rich countries of the North have not only a duty, but also an interest, in assisting their poorest neighbours in the southern hemisphere to seize the opportunities that globalization offers them and to allow them to participate more equitably in the global economy".

My country feels that the time has come for the international community to seriously tackle the unavoidable problem of the eradication of poverty, at least in its most extreme form. We share the firm conviction that our Organization must promote, in the words of the Charter,

> "higher standards of living, full employment, and conditions of economic and social progress and development".

This would be the first step towards eliminating the imbalances that are among the underlying causes of many conflicts around the world, for a world in which some make progress while others fall behind carries within it the seeds of its own instability. Can we therefore move towards a new concept of the idea of security that no longer focuses on the security of nations alone, but that focuses above all on the well-being of peoples? The sine qua non condition for sparing future generations from the scourge of war is to move from a culture of war towards a culture of peace.

There are genuine reasons to be concerned about peace and stability in the world. Maintaining international peace and security, a task assigned to our Organization, has been severely put to the test by the outbreak and persistence of a number of crises. In this regard, Africa has become the main theatre of these devastating crises, which result in countless victims, refugees and displaced persons.

In spite of this regrettable situation, we have seen some encouraging signs concerning the restoration of peace in certain African subregions. The recent signing of the peace Agreement by all the parties to the conflict in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, including all the rebel movements, now opens up the way for a lasting settlement of the conflict. We urge all the parties to translate into action the will they expressed in signing the Lusaka Agreement on 10 July 1999. It is now urgent for the international community, and for the Security Council in particular, to take the necessary steps for the full implementation of the Agreement without delay.

In the neighbouring Republic of the Congo, the authorities have again recently expressed their willingness to engage in dialogue with the opposition. In return, the opposition has also made clear its intention to take part in an inter-Congolese dialogue in order to achieve lasting peace.

The recent Lomé Agreement on Sierra Leone is also a positive sign of a return of lasting peace to that country.

My country is pleased with the resumption of the peace process in the Middle East and urges the complete application of the Wye Plantation agreements, as well as full compliance with the agreements signed in the past.

Despite all of this progress, we cannot overlook the fact that important efforts still have to made in Angola as a result of UNITA's refusal to implement the Lusaka agreements.

Likewise, despite the prospects that are beginning to appear, the border dispute between Ethiopia and Eritrea still remains a burning issue.

According to the most recent report of the Secretary-General, Somalia is, unfortunately, still without State institutions. The time has come to reintegrate that country into the concert of nations.

Guaranteeing lasting peace and security is today a collective matter. Although the primary responsibility for the maintenance of peace falls to the Security Council, it is appropriate for the United Nations to encourage the development of regional peacekeeping and security mechanisms, in accordance with Chapter VIII of the Charter. Significant progress has been made in Central Africa in preventing and managing conflicts within the framework of the United Nations Standing Advisory Committee on Security Questions in Central Africa. The implementation of the early-warning mechanism and the creation of the high council for peace and security in Central Africa are perfect examples of this.

It is also worth mentioning the joint military exercises to be held by the member States of the Committee in Gabon during the first half of the year 2000 to simulate peacekeeping operations. Furthermore, in preparation for the military exercises that will be held in Gabon within the framework of strengthening African peacekeeping capabilities, a military-diplomatic seminar took place in Libreville in June 1999, with the participation of 51 countries and international organizations.

In the last few weeks, the Security Council has held public debates on such vital topics as children and civilians in armed conflicts. And five days ago, I had the honour of participating in another public debate of the Security Council on small weapons. This matter is part of the United Nations efforts to work towards complete disarmament. Indeed, the illegal circulation of massive quantities of light and small-calibre weapons in the world hampers development and represents a real threat to international peace and security. The nature of these weapons unfortunately helps fuel the sad and widely condemned phenomenon of the use of children as combatants in the many conflicts that break out around the world. The same applies to large-scale banditry.

In any case, we cannot envision a world at peace if the international community does not actively mobilize to help developing countries emerge from the vicious circle of underdevelopment-violence-underdevelopment. If luck has heretofore spared us from the horrors of war, Gabon is not immune to the backlash of the armed conflicts that plague some of our neighbours. As Security Council resolution 1208 (1998) clearly indicates, asylum countries pay a heavy price for their solidarity with people driven out of their homes as a result of combat. The consequences of refugee flows on the security, environment and economies of host countries are sometimes incalculable, especially when the presence of combatants among the refugees is used as an excuse for troops to carry out raids in the host country.

Even though we live in peace and have never experienced a domestic or inter-State war, Gabon nevertheless shoulders its share of the burdens of war. We are facing massive migratory flows that are leading to serious internal upheavals, and we recently welcomed some 50,000 refugees.

Given the extent of the situation, for which my country was not prepared, the President of the Republic of Gabon organized on 11 August last a mini-summit in Libreville with the participation of a number of his peers from the subregion. That summit considered the possibility of Africans' taking greater control of the question of refugees and displaced persons, with the support of the international community.

On that occasion, President Bongo proposed the creation of an African agency for emergency humanitarian intervention. I would urgently appeal to the international community to provide greater assistance to African refugees. We strongly hope that an emergency programme can be set up that would relieve their suffering and facilitate their return to their country of origin. The international community has the means to do so, as it has proved in other situations.

I would like to take advantage of this opportunity to pay warm tribute to Mrs. Sadako Ogata, United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, who, during the international action taken in favour of Kosovo, heightened the international community's awareness of the particular situation of African refugees.

Let me now tackle the question of development from the perspective of my country's experience. As in other African countries, the socio-economic situation of Gabon is precarious. I shall not then resort to clichés such as saying that my country is an "African emirate" because of our potential in raw materials, to the extent that today we are the only sub-Saharan nation to be classified by international financial and monetary institutions as an upper-middle-income country. As a result, we are denied access to flexible conditions for our loans and for our debt service.

However, the Human Development Index, which places us in 124th place, clearly shows that Gabon is in a very similar situation to that of other African countries. That is why we have undertaken all of the necessary structural reforms to join the global economy and to participate in subregional and regional integration. We have liberalized our economy by lifting tariff and non-tariff barriers and restrictions as well as by instituting customs and tax reform. We have privatized our principal semi-public corporations in order to make them more effective and competitive. We have created a new juridical and institutional environment that is stable and will encourage investment and promote the expansion of the private sector. Finally, we have set up effective provisions for cooperation and regional integration in the framework of the Economic and Monetary Community of Central Africa and of the Economic Community of Central African States.

The stage has been set, but the actors — meaning the investors — have not yet made their entrance. Foreign direct investment has thus far systematically avoided our continent.

We feel, however, that the world economy stands to gain by taking advantage of the immense potential of the African market, which will soon have a billion consumers in a continent that is overflowing with oil, gold, diamonds and other raw materials required by industries of the North.

My country's leadership is dedicated to the promotion of democracy and the institutions that guarantee it— hence all of the political changes we have experienced and are experiencing, which have made Gabon an example of a smooth transition from a single-party regime to political pluralism.

It is against this backdrop that recently, in the presence of international observers and for the second time since the advent of political pluralism, free and fair presidential elections were held in my country. The President of the Republic, El Hadj Omar Bongo, was re-elected in a peaceful social and political context, a guarantee of democratic legitimacy.

Democracy which is accompanied by good governance, the rule of law and respect for human rights is the most important factor in the transition towards a culture of peace. For lasting peace is a prerequisite for the exercise of all the rights and obligations of peoples, and it is the only soil in which democracy and development can take root.

It is therefore up to the United Nations system and its Member States to ensure that these goals and principles, so dear to us, become a reality for all in the new millennium.

The Acting President (*spoke in Spanish*): I now give the floor to the Minister for Foreign Affairs, Tourism and Information of Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, His Excellency The Honourable Allan Cruickshank.

Mr. Cruickshank (Saint Vincent and the Grenadines): I take this opportunity to congratulate Mr. Theo-Ben Gurirab on his election to the presidency of this session of the General Assembly. I am confident that his vision and energy will guide this session to a successful conclusion.

I also thank Mr. Didier Opertti, who led the fifty-third session of the General Assembly with remarkable distinction and efficiency. I commend Mr. Kofi Annan, the esteemed Secretary-General of this Organization, of whom the people of the Caribbean are particularly proud for his vision and managerial skills as he heads the United Nations, in precarious financial circumstances, responding to increased demands with diminishing resources. I wish to assure the Secretary-General of the continued support and cooperation of the Government of Saint Vincent and the Grenadines.

I join previous speakers in welcoming the Republic of Kiribati, the Republic of Nauru and the Kingdom of Tonga as new Members of the United Nations family. Their membership strengthens the universal character of our Organization.

I extend condolences to the families of the victims of the earthquakes in Turkey, Greece and, more recently, the Republic of China on Taiwan. I reiterate the sentiments of sympathy already transmitted to the Government and people of the Bahamas, a sister country in the Caribbean Community, and to the United States of America in relation to the devastation wrought by Hurricane Floyd.

The fifty-fourth anniversary of the founding of the United Nations, coming at the end of a century that has seen war and destruction on the one hand and unprecedented developments in science and technology on the other, provides a timely opportunity to reflect on the Organization's achievements, assess its continued relevance in a radically changed environment and chart an appropriate course of action for the future. Many powerful forces believe that the United Nations has perhaps outlived its usefulness and exists now only as the world's most expensive debating club. Ministers of Finance are presently convened in Washington, D.C., at the annual meeting of the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank Group. There, too, the opinion can no doubt be heard that circumstances have now overtaken the Bretton Woods institutions.

The big and powerful nations of the world can afford to argue thus, but for small, vulnerable, developing countries such as Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, these institutions are important buffers in the interplay between finance and politics in the international arena. The operating budgets of many transnational corporations are far greater than the national budgets of developing countries such as mine, and we are painfully

aware that the international development agenda is controlled by these corporations.

Despite the technological advances of the last decade and the tremendous increase in worldwide commerce, the benefits of globalization have not been evenly distributed and it is abundantly clear that developing countries continue to be marginalized. While we acknowledge and respect the general thrust towards open markets, competition and free trade, I must reiterate my country's position regarding our vital trade in bananas. Even as we move to diversify, improve quality and pursue alternative strategies and options for development in tourism, financial services and informatics, our economic survival and social stability remain closely linked to the banana trade and the income it provides for our farmers. Indeed, there is a strong and persistent correlation between the rate of economic growth and the performance of the industry. This is further illustrated by the following facts: in Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, the contribution of the banana industry to direct employment is 40 per cent; in the Windward Islands as a whole, banana export earnings account for over 50 per cent of the gross domestic product; and windward Islands exports account for only 1 per cent of the world trade in bananas.

The imminent collapse of our major banana market demonstrates just how powerless small developing States continue to be against powerful countries and mega-corporations. The disregard for our interests and, indeed, our survival, by the United States of America, which does not export a single hand of bananas, is truly inexplicable. The inevitable consequences of this stance will be economic and social dislocation, manifested in increased unemployment, impoverishment for our farmers, crime and the erosion of basic human rights and dignity.

The iniquitous and restrictive immigration policies of certain developed countries have served only to exacerbate the social disintegration of our societies, which are already under severe stress.

If small developing economies are to be able to attract investment, expand production, improve product quality and meet standards — in short, compete effectively and grasp the opportunities presented in the World Trade Organization agreements — it is imperative that recognition should be given to their need for support and for adequate transitional periods to fully liberalized world trade, which should apply also to the banana trade.

As a corollary to our overall economic development strategy, the Government of Saint Vincent and the Grenadines continues to explore, with the assistance of friendly nations, options for enhanced airport development on mainland Saint Vincent. The requirements for agricultural and economic diversification make this endeavour even more urgent.

We are exceptionally grateful to the European Union for the support which it is continuing to give to ensure our survival, even in the face of threats to its own economic prosperity. Saint Vincent and the Grenadines is involved, with other members of the Caribbean Community (CARICOM), in a fundamental process of deepening regional integration through the establishment of a single market and economy by 2001. We are taking important steps to facilitate the free movement of goods, services, capital and people in the countries of the Community. We are doing this at a time when the momentum of trade liberalization and economic globalization has never been greater.

The region is also committed to the establishment of the Free Trade Area of the Americas by 2004. CARICOM has established regional negotiating machinery to coordinate the region's participation in external trade negotiations, including the Seattle Round of multinational trade negotiations.

Saint Vincent and the Grenadines is resolute in its opposition to the international trade in drugs. To this end, my Government is moving bilaterally and with member countries of the Organization of Eastern Caribbean States and CARICOM, to establish agreements with third countries on mutual assistance in criminal matters. The Government of Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, recognizing its own limitations in confronting the enormous power and resources of drug traffickers, has signed a "ship rider" agreement that gives authority to pursue such criminals in the territorial waters of our archipelagic State.

Governments in the small developing countries of the Caribbean pay a high political price for cooperating with the developed countries in the fight against drugs. There were loud protests from certain sections of the population against the Government when the security forces of Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, in collaboration with the Regional Security Service and contingents from other friendly countries, launched an eradication campaign in our mountainous interior: they questioned the Government's cooperation at a time when

access for bananas and other products from the Caribbean to the European market was being challenged.

My Government will continue to honour its commitments under all international agreements to which we are signatory. We have enacted appropriate stringent measures in our financial regulations to ensure that proceeds from the illicit drug trade are not laundered in our financial system. The efforts of economically vulnerable countries such as ours in combatting the scourge of drugs must be recognized and supported by the international community in general, and by traditionally friendly countries in particular.

Our countries do not wish to be forced out of the world trade in legitimate products, causing our peoples to turn in desperation to trafficking in illegal products. In Saint Vincent and the Grenadines and in other countries members of the Caribbean Community (CARICOM), we believe in stability based on a solid foundation of democracy, respect for human rights and the creation of economic and other opportunities for the development of our peoples. CARICOM has built an outstanding record in this regard. The recent mission to Haiti headed by our own Prime Minister, The Right Honourable Sir James Mitchell, to examine that country's readiness to conduct general elections, is another example of CARICOM's commitment to those principles.

Saint Vincent and the Grenadines places very high priority on education, training and human-resource development. These are a very important part of the declaration of principles adopted by the leaders of the 34 countries of the western hemisphere at the second Summit of the Americas, held at Santiago, Chile, in 1998.

I take this opportunity to reiterate the gratitude of the Government and the people of Saint Vincent and the Grenadines to the Government and the people of Cuba, which despite their difficult economic circumstances, caused by the continuing trade embargo against that Caribbean country, have offered numerous scholarships to the young people of Saint Vincent and the Grenadines. Saint Vincent and the Grenadines places great value on this unmistakable act of friendship and assistance.

Small island developing States such as Saint Vincent and the Grenadines attach great importance to such issues as the integrity of our coastal and marine resources, solid-waste management and natural-disaster preparedness, because we are conscious of the negative repercussions that can result if effective measures are not put in place. We run the risk of damaging our fragile ecosystems to the detriment of development and tourism, and moreover compromising their sustainable use and enjoyment by future generations. It is for that reason that CARICOM condemns in the strongest terms the shipment of hazardous material through the territorial waters of the Caribbean countries. Without the benefit of scientific proof of the origins and reasons for the recent fish kill in our waters, there is cause for serious concern; investigation in this regard is ongoing. Saint Vincent and the Grenadines shares the concerns expressed by other small island developing States and strongly supports the adoption of a draft resolution on small island developing States recognizing the Caribbean Sea as a special area in the context of sustainable development.

The vulnerability of small States has been made more acute because of lack of capacity, declining aid flows, graduation from concessionary financing, the disappearance of trade preferences, and a lack of competitiveness. The implementation of the Barbados Programme of Action for the Sustainable Development of Small Island Developing States is therefore imperative for our survival.

My delegation fully supports the efforts of the international community in addressing the conflicts in Kosovo and in East Timor. We look forward to lasting peace and stability in those areas.

Saint Vincent and the Grenadines also applauds the efforts and commitment of Prime Minister Barak of Israel and Chairman Arafat of the Palestine Liberation Organization to bring peace and security to the people of their region.

A draft resolution on the readmission to this body of the Republic of China on Taiwan was once again defeated. Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, however, strongly supports the aspiration of those 21 million people to exercise their right to share and participate in the activities of this community of nations.

My country has consistently expressed its views in relation to reform of the United Nations in general and of the Security Council in particular. I will not revisit them now, but I wish to reiterate that Saint Vincent and the Grenadines strongly favours reform of the United Nations to give more equitable consideration to the concerns of the majority of countries comprising the General Assembly. Let us remodel it along more democratic lines to address the realities of the world today.

As we approach the new millennium, my delegation would like to urge all Member States to demonstrate their unwavering support for the goals and ideals enshrined in the Charter of the United Nations: peace, security, human rights, fundamental freedoms, international cooperation, and development for all mankind.

The Acting President (*spoke in Spanish*): I call next on the Minister of State for Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation of the Democratic Republic of the Congo, His Excellency Mr. Yerodia Abdoulaye Ndombasi.

Mr. Ndombasi (Democratic Republic of the Congo) (*spoke in French*): The convening in the splendid metropolis of New York of this last General Assembly session of the millennium affords me the happy opportunity, on behalf of the people, the Government of Public Salvation and the head of State, His Excellency President Laurent-Désiré Kabila, of the Democratic Republic of the Congo, to convey our warmest greetings to all people the world over who love peace and justice.

It is my pleasant duty also to congratulate the President of the General Assembly and the other Assembly officers on their unanimous election to the leadership of the Assembly at its fifty-fourth session. My country views the election to the presidency of Mr. Theo-Ben Gurirab as recognition of his many sterling qualities, both human and professional, and as an acknowledgement by the international community of the important role played by his country, Namibia, in building an Africa and a world that will be marked by peace, political stability and economic prosperity. The President may be sure that the delegation of the Democratic Republic of the Congo will unreservedly support him in fulfilling his mandate and in guiding the work of the Assembly to a successful conclusion.

I also extend to his predecessor, Mr. Didier Opertti, our full appreciation of the extremely important work he did during his presidency, as well as the commitment he showed throughout to the triumph of the ideals embodied in the United Nations Charter.

Finally, my delegation would like to welcome here in our world Organization three new Members: the Republic of Kiribati, the Republic of Nauru and the Kingdom of Tonga.

I invite Members to read my prepared text at their leisure, so that I may say a few other things. I begin with a good quotation, from Article 2 of the United Nations Charter:

> "The Organization and its Members, in pursuit of the Purposes stated in Article 1, shall act in accordance with the following Principles.
>
> "1. The Organization is based on the principle of the sovereign equality of all its Members.
>
> "2. All Members, in order to ensure to all of them the rights and benefits resulting from membership, shall fulfil in good faith the obligations assumed by them in accordance with the present Charter.
>
> "3. All Members shall settle their international disputes by peaceful means in such a manner that international peach and security, and justice, are not endangered.
>
> "4. All Members shall refrain in their international relations from the threat or use of force against the territorial integrity or political independence of any state, or in any other manner inconsistent with the Purposes of the United Nations".

I say to representatives: This is the United Nations Charter, your Charter. Are there represented in this Hall — yes or no — Members that violate these principles governing relations between nations? Are there represented in this Hall — yes or no — Members that do worse than those that do not pay their dues, or pay them late, regarding which immediate reminders are sent, and rightly so, since the rules of procedure of the Organization of which they are Members prescribe that for its proper functioning each Member must pay its dues? Failing to do so even means being stripped of the right to speak here at the United Nations. So, if you have your right to speak taken away, if you are punished as a Member of the United Nations because you do not pay your dues, what about those who violate Article 2 of the Charter, who cross the boundaries of another State with their armies, sow hardship in that country, occupy vast portions of its territory, plunder its natural resources, steal the fauna and rare species of animals which international organizations recognize as being received by other countries, carry out a blitzkrieg such as the one in the early 1940s, without warning, without provocation, entering the country of another people with their arms

and everything else they need, under pretexts which I shall expose in a little while.

On 2 August 1998, some two years ago, our brothers from the hills of Rwanda, Burundi and Uganda invaded our country in an unprovoked blitzkrieg, without having declared war, and it continues to this very day. For two years now those Members of the United Nations have been violating Article 2, and they continue to violate it, with arrogance and total impunity, which is not the case for those who fail to pay their dues.

It is perhaps better to violate Article 2, occupy other countries, pillage them, deport their inhabitants and torture children, women and old persons, than it is to commit the mortal sin of failing to pay up. There are two yardsticks, double standards, which we regard as an immense injustice.

As I speak I feel the presence of illustrious persons who have spoken from this rostrum in the past, such as Cabral, Nkrumah and — I say this with a great deal of emotion — Lumumba, who came here to denounce what was being set in train more than 30 years ago, under United Nations banners which is now being repeated. We know the United Nations. The French rightly say "A cat that has been scalded is even afraid of cold water." They have already come, those United Nations forces; they came to restore peace, and the result was that for one of the most illustrious sons of our people, the most admired African nationalist President Patrice Lumumba, the flag of the United Nations served as a shroud. We do not wish, we will not allow, that same flag to be a shroud for those who have taken up the torch that fell from Lumumba's hands and who carried it, with some help of course, as far as lying down — with their boots on — in Mobutu's bed. This is something with which the Assembly is familiar.

It is on behalf of my President, my friend, my long-time comrade, that I speak. As representatives will see, and as I often say, we will have no more charming "Rastas", because we lost our hair waiting for President Kabila to return to relight the torch that fell from Lumumba's hands.

If people do not watch out, if they let things slide along, if they tolerate arrogance and do not stand up to impunity, there are those who will begin to dream of wrapping Kabila up in the United Nations flag, as was done in the case of Patrice Lumumba not long ago.

When events are repeated, they do not always happen in exactly the same way, but sometimes the repetition strikes a familiar chord. Now we see the United Nations delaying putting an end to what it calls euphemistically the "conflict" in the Great Lakes region. This terminology is being used for some reason — but what? A foreign army crosses the border, occupies the country, a part of the country; it pillages the country's wealth — and the United Nations calls this a "conflict"? We should check our dictionaries. This is a war. Instead of shouting themselves hoarse about sending peacekeepers, Member States must send people who can put an end to the war. This is what I am waiting for. Our Rwandan, Ugandan and Burundi brothers must be solemnly requested here and now to go back home. They have no business being in our country. They are undermining all national reconstruction efforts. This should be clear to those who understand the condition in which we found this country, which used to be called Zaire and which we now call, as Lumumba called it, the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

The presence of these outsiders, their occupation, impedes our efforts to reconstruct our country. They came upon us like thieves who attack without warning. They attacked while we were busy sowing corn, peanuts and beans, and we were doing so because that was what we was needed in this country that is overflowing with diamonds, gold, cobalt, copper and so forth. In order to help our people we had begun by planting peanuts corn and beans, but our efforts were stopped cold by these people who are now in our territory, who came from the hills, who came to defend their borders — their borders that, according to them, were threatened by genocidal bands in our country.

I ask the Assembly to look at a map of Africa, a map of the Congo in particular. I come from the Atlantic Coast province of Bas-Congo. Do you know where these people who began the war came from, in order to secure their borders? They came from 2,000 kilometres away from my province. They began in my province in order to secure borders 2,000 kilometres away. They brought soldiers 2,000 kilometres from their borders in order to begin the occupation of our country. Luckily, they took a licking, and they would all have been wiped out if the Americans had not asked us to allow them to return home along a designated route. They retreated after their thrashing and tried their luck in the east of our country.

After the ceasefire requested by Secretary-General Kofi Annan, United Nations staff went to the area to

carry out an order of the World Health Organization to vaccinate all children up to five years of age. We have vaccinated them in the part of the country that we continue to control. But these others — who only have two hands, both of which are busy pillaging — have yet to vaccinate the children in this age group. Thus, these children are in danger not only of polio, but also of other diseases that the agencies of our Organization have been striving to eliminate from our continent.

These soldiers do not have time to vaccinate our children. They do not even have time to pillage effectively because these Horatii and Curiatii have taken to fighting each other on our soil. They came to take control of our country, but now, how strange, they are fighting each other, these people who came to teach us democracy, these people who came to restore peace. In order to have a break from their looting, they are enjoying a little war on our land, and in the process destroying the 3 million doses of vaccine that the United Nations, through the World Health Organization, sent to Kisangani. They shoot at each other, each band allied with this or that local. This is what is happening.

And then these people take their place here as United Nations Members — after having treated us like that, and as they continue to do so. They are building up their arsenals, bringing in troops, taking towns. What reassures us is the teaching of the Marquis de Sade that taking is not the same as possessing. Thus, these people are taking towns but they do not possess them. And they will not posses them because, just as in erotic relations, there is no possession without consent — that consent that has been given to us. Otherwise, our people would not have fled to the forests to escape from these people who come from the hills. Our citizens' lengthy stay in the forests has led to the reappearance of some diseases that were eradicated as long ago as the Belgian colonial era.

Having to flee the invaders like the plague makes our citizens' lives more difficult. And these people from the hills continue to advance even though they signed with us, last 10 July, a Ceasefire Agreement that lacks both fire and a cease, as they continue to advance and lay siege to our cities.

Their latest exploit, which they are now engaged in, is to lay siege to the city of Mbuji-Mayi, the world diamond capital, but also the world capital of children afflicted with polio. I do not think that their haste and willingness to return to Mbuji-Mayi are out of desire to vaccinate the poor Congolese children who are infected with or at risk of getting polio. These people from the hills do not have a third hand, as I said earlier, yet I am sure that, driven by their greed, they are going to take as many diamonds and as much copper and cobalt as they can — and at the risk of fighting each other for these minerals, since Uganda also wants to take them. The statistics on sales of diamonds indicate that last month our Rwandan brothers sold more than a million carats of diamonds — a mineral not mined in their country — and with the money from the sales they are buying weapons so as to be able to fight us. Then they take more diamonds, buy more weapons and continue to fight us.

In this Hall speeches have been made against dirty money. Therefore, we are outraged to see bloodstained cobalt, bloodstained copper, bloodstained gold and bloodstained diamonds for sale on the international market, and to see that it does not occur to the buyers of this booty to put a stop to this practice by refusing to buy it — even though they oppose dirty money. Double standards continue to prevail.

Dirty money poses a threat to the world. And yet, while the blood of the Congolese people is spattered on our cobalt, our copper and our gold, that doesn't seem to bother those from all over the world who buy them and give money to the pillagers and occupiers our country. If we revisit this issue, I reserve the right to address it again.

I wish, however, to speak out loud and clear against the infamous pretext that has aroused the world's prurience and sensitivity about genocide. Those who are guilty of genocide are in our country right now. Let them leave and go on sowing misery in their own countries: Rwanda, Uganda or Burundi.

As I said at the outset, President Kabila has raised Lumumba's torch and welcomed those who sought refuge in our country, because over there you do not seek refuge — you get your throat slit. I was just a schoolboy when I saw Hutus fleeing cutthroat Tutsi and Tutsi fleeing cutthroat Hutus. They all sought refuge with us. That is how those who helped us, who walked with us on our march on Kinshasa, came to be refugees in our country — they fled Hutus who would have cut their throats. That is at the heart of the current instability and reflects the values of our brothers in Rwanda. We must help our Rwandese to change their political culture.

When the "one man one vote" law was enacted in 1960, the obsession of each of these groups was to seize

power and abuse it in order to hasten the carnage. This carnage has been alternating and reciprocal and did not begin in 1994. I cited a date when I was in short pants, and I can assure the Assembly that it was not yesterday. It is the open faucet that produced the interahamwe that we must close. Rwanda must become democratic; Rwanda must adopt a culture of politics and abandon its culture of carnage. Rwanda must leave our country; Uganda must leave our country; Burundi must leave our country and turn over the task of providing security to United Nations observers, who will take their place and serve as a buffer force between us. Those people are our neighbours and we can never replace our neighbours, but they are on our territory, which means they are no longer our neighbours. I ask the Assembly to help us to resume our status as neighbours. Let them go back home and if there are problems that we must settle among ourselves, we shall settle them by peaceful means.

I am speaking without acrimony. We hold out our hands to our brothers from Rwanda, who have been here for several days. I offer them signals of friendship when we pass, and they respond. We are here so that in three months, when the new millennium dawns, we will not still be fighting. One must deal with urgent matters quickly.

The Lusaka process, in which I participated, raised hopes that have been dashed by dilatory tactics. One moment the Congolese and Rwandese affiliates who refuse to come; the next, it is the Ugandans or their Congolese puppets. Here we are on 29 September and nothing has yet been done seriously to implement an Agreement that was reached on 10 July.

That is why we ask the Assembly, if only out of respect for the Articles of the Charter, to do something about it. It is intolerable and incomprehensible that these people remain, and may even take the floor here, while they continue to violate the United Nations Charter and the principles that bring us together here. If you violate the principles of an organization to which you belong, you are no longer worthy of belonging.

We must remind our brothers that, as Members of the United Nations, they are bound to respect the Charter. This cannot be done by occupying other people's countries. If differences must be settled by invasion and plunder, there will no longer be a United Nations, because there will no longer be any rules to unite us. That prompts my request to the Assembly, because the suffering being endured by the Congolese people and the atrocities being visited upon us are unimaginable.

Under the very nose of the Vatican, in the Italian mission of Kasika, these new-style Huns entered, tore open the chest of a traditional chief, pulled out his heart, shredded it and distributed the pieces like hosts. The killers who did this sucked on the bloody heart as if it were an ice-cream cone. We have seen this and continue to witness such acts. Our United Nations mission is at Members' disposal to provide irrefutable testimony, which we have published in a three-volume white paper that could easily grow into further volumes describing similar incidents. We have requested that this white paper be issued as a working document of the Security Council. All are invited to study it in order to understand precisely what is happening and to put an end to this situation — to save the United Nations itself, to help us Africans, and the Congolese in particular, who had to wait 32 years to defeat and eliminate a regime of notorious satraps, only to see new satraps step in two months later to occupy our country and put it to the sword.

Help us to make our Rwandese, Ugandan and Burundian brothers understand that they must go home. They have no business in our country; let them relinquish their place to United Nations forces, which will secure their borders. That is in itself a fiction that we have not had an opportunity to dwell on. They helped us to raise Lumumba's torch. They were in our army. Most officers in our army were from Rwanda, as was the Chief of Staff, who dispatched his troops on the basis of his particular military skills. Moreover, these people have occupied that region of our country for two years and are still hunting the Interahamwe, as the Incas were once hunted here. They will not stop until Joe the Ugandan and Bill the Rwandese have extended their hunting grounds to the entire territory of our country while they prance after the Interahamwe.

This is just a pretext. If they were not able to catch a single Interahamwe while their officers were in our army; if they have been unable to stop the interahamwe in their two-year occupation of that region, then the task is beyond them. It must be left to the United Nations to unseat these Interahamwe, if they exist, and let us pursue our national reconstruction.

I have a great deal more to say and believe that we will have further opportunities in due course.

The Acting President (*spoke in Spanish*): I call on the Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Lithuania, His Excellency Mr. Algirdas Saudargas.

Mr. Saudargas (Lithuania): It is a special pleasure for me to see Mr. Theo-Ben Gurirab guiding the General Assembly this session over the junction of two centuries and millenniums. We will lend all possible support to his endeavours, including through the Permanent Representative of Lithuania, who is also one of his Vice-Chairmen.

Another landmark of this session is the fact that we have grown. We welcome the Republic of Kiribati, the Republic of Nauru and the Kingdom of Tonga to this house of nations where all, large or small, are equal. We are glad to see nations from the Pacific enrich the organization. On behalf of the Lithuanian Government I pay our deep respects to the Secretary-General, who has always been a brilliant servant of peace around the globe.

Speakers before me have referred to the symbolic meaning of this session of the General Assembly. It may be just a simple turn of our calendar pages or we can make it a stepping-stone to a better world with less violence, more food for the hungry, less deliberately caused suffering and death, more care for the helpless and more shelter for the homeless.

This century has taught us many lessons. Yet, even if we have avoided another world war, we have witnessed too many wars. The nature of crises has changed. Member States should be able to find common ground in upholding the principles of the Charter and acting in defence of humanity. We should devise ways and means to prevent humanitarian catastrophes and alleviate profound human suffering. Just this last year, Angola and Kosovo, Sierra Leone and East Timor have posed new challenges to the United Nations and made us re-evaluate our actions in conflict prevention; the role of the United Nations Security Council and its interactions with regional organizations; the Council's credibility with regard to speed of deployment; the role of civilian police and civilian administration; and the problem of impunity. When evidence of the murder of helpless people percolates through international borders, the dilemma emerging before the international community becomes a moral one of the sanctity of human life and strict international standards.

It is precisely towards this end that the United Nations system is undergoing changes. A number of administrative measures have been taken, especially those within the power of the Secretary-General. One of the most urgent measures which must be taken is reform of the Security Council. The Council has too often been accused of failures in the maintenance of international peace and security in the specific cases I mentioned.

The efficiency of the Security Council's actions can be enhanced by improving its representativeness, legitimacy and credibility, thus generating wider acceptance of its decisions. This would be possible primarily through an enlargement of the Council's membership. The two most qualified industrialized countries could become permanent members of the Security Council: their membership would strengthen the Council and ensure democratic decisions. A broader representation of developing nations on the Council would also reinforce its legitimacy and enhance respect for it: they deserve additional seats, both permanent and non-permanent.

In recent years we have seen the development of the United Nations response away from peacekeeping to more active conflict prevention and crises management of civilian. Internal crises often lead to the complete destruction of societies and their structures: repair and rehabilitation of collapsed countries by the international community are needed.

The United Nations needs both the means and cooperation from all if it is to fulfil its mandate in terms of its primary responsibility for maintaining international peace and security. In this connection, Lithuania signed a standby agreement as early as the beginning of 1998 and provided a detailed description of its contribution. A substantial part of our contribution is comprised of well-trained civilian policemen who are now doing their duty by serving in Kosovo.

A comprehensive set of political measures will have to be elaborated before and adopted at the millennium summit, which should be a breath of fresh air for the Organization. We take this seriously and are ready to assist in designing a meaningful future for the United Nations.

Situations that deteriorate into conflicts are ignited by a variety of causes, usually a combination of them. The wave of economic crashes that swept through Asia, Latin America and some European countries has had a global impact. The quick recovery of many economies shows that democracies with free market economies have the strongest immunity against macroeconomic illnesses. Markets and democracy allow for the fairest distribution of resources within societies which would otherwise be feeling the pain of economic injustice.

Similarly, concerns about the potential and actual violence which more often occurs within than between States are almost always well-founded in places with poor human rights records. No one today is surprised by news of violence sparked by various rebel groups that feel marginalized in the States where they live.

Many instruments must still be designed to uphold the principle that those responsible for gross violations of human rights and crimes against humanity — who still expect impunity — must be held accountable. The establishment of the International Criminal Court is one of the fruits of the new developments in international relations. We are committed to the early entry into force of the Rome Statute and to an effective International Criminal Court.

Weaponry and armaments can be reduced through common actions, regardless of borders. There is literally a consensus among nations that weapons of mass destruction must be eliminated, but in reality the process of nuclear disarmament is unacceptably precarious. We see reductions in numbers of warheads in some places and the development of nuclear weapons in others. Also, the biological and chemical weapons which States have reduced have become available to non-State terrorist entities that feel almost no qualms about using them. I see no other way to build a safer world than by reducing, eliminating and very strictly prohibiting weapons of mass destruction and the means for delivering them.

Conventional arms and weapons are also weapons of mass destruction of life: half a million lives in Rwanda were wiped out with clubs and machetes that can only be considered weapons. Lives are lost to firearms and landmines all over the world, even in places that can hardly qualify as battlegrounds. The elimination of landmines is under way. Nowhere else but in this Hall can we begin effective conventional disarmament to be carried out under the responsibility of all States.

Europe happens to be blessed with good regional security instruments, the best of which was nevertheless inspired by the deaths of millions in senseless wars. The European security charter, the concepts for which are now being discussed in the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), will further build on the ideals of democracy, peace and unity set out in the Charter of Paris for a New Europe on the basis of the Helsinki Final Act. The implementation of OSCE principles, including a country's right to choose its own security arrangements, is fundamental to ensuring peace and security. Finally, regional, subregional and bilateral practical cooperative efforts do enhance broader European endeavours and processes, including complementing — not undercutting — the work of other Euro-Atlantic institutions.

We believe in collective security and have made membership in effective alliances of democratic and peace-loving nations — the European Union and the North Atlantic Treaty Organization — our priority. The collective security that we have chosen is the most efficient means of meeting our legitimate needs.

Lithuania works actively in the Baltic region to create security and stability based on cooperation and good-neighbourly relations. The Baltic Sea region is becoming one of the most stable and dynamic, developing and promising regions in this part of the world.

Nine days ago, Secretary-General Kofi Annan spoke from this very podium about a progressing supremacy of collective needs over individual needs. In fact, his speech was a testimony of brave and modern thought. It deserves a place in textbooks for politicians and diplomats.

Conflicts are but one challenge for us. There are so many inhabitants on Earth who need our help yet sometimes cannot even ask for it. Children deserve our strongest love, and yet they are helplessly suffering in many parts of the world. They do not realize that the adult world will soon celebrate the tenth anniversary of the adoption of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, which has been ratified or acceded to by 191 countries — more than the number of United Nations Member States. It is the most universal human rights treaty, the violation of which must be inconceivable and punishable. The newly adopted Convention on the Elimination of the Worst Forms of Child Labour should also become universal and support compliance.

This year will also be the twentieth year since the adoption of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW). It is symbolic and crucial that this Convention has been strengthened by the optional protocol. Lithuania supports the proposal by Austria, after its adoption by the United Nations General Assembly, to have this new human rights instrument opened for signature on 10 December, which marks Human Rights Day 1999. States have to give women the chance to address their grievances to the CEDAW Committee as soon as possible, perhaps even at the special session of the General Assembly on "Women

2000: gender, equality, development and peace for the twenty-first century" to be held in June in the year 2000.

Ideals advocated by Woodrow Wilson at the beginning of this century are celebrating their second birth at the very end of the century. I am convinced that after many ups and downs, the evolution of humankind is finally taking the straight and right course.

The Acting President: I now call on the chairman of the delegation of Antigua and Barbuda, His Excellency Mr. Patrick Albert Lewis.

Mr. Lewis (Antigua and Barbuda): Antigua and Barbuda offers hearty congratulations on the election of the president of the General Assembly at its fifty-fourth session. His efforts towards bringing about the independence of Namibia are well known, and many of us remember when he occupied a seat on the right side of the main section of this Hall, sitting as an observer behind the name plate of the South-West Africa People's Organization (SWAPO).

Mr. Gurirab's call for the return to Africa of its plundered artwork and artifacts struck a chord, as those of us who studied the African liberation struggles will recall that some 25 years ago, when he was a younger individual, he pleaded with this body for the return of African icons which adorned European and North American museums and private collections. My country is most supportive of his plea and would urge that the priceless treasures of artwork, icons and relics be returned to the continent from which they were taken.

My country also wishes to thank his predecessor, Didier Opertti, who hails from Latin America and the Caribbean, for the astute and skilful manner in which he conducted the affairs of the fifty-third session. Likewise, my nation's sentiments go out to Secretary-General Kofi Annan, and we wish him continued success in the arduous tasks of bringing peace, harmony, development and justice to a global community not yet united into a true family of nations.

A warm welcome is simultaneously extended to the Republic of Kiribati, the Republic of Nauru and the Kingdom of Tonga on becoming full-fledged members of the United Nations.

To the people of our sister Caribbean Community (CARICOM) State of the Bahamas, we extend our profound sympathy in the wake of the devastation wrought by Hurricane Floyd upon the islands of Abaco, Eleuthera, San Salvador and Cat Island, as well as other parts of the country. We thank donor countries and international institutions for the assistance given in the past, and we hope that there will be a speedy response to the needs of the Bahamian community at this time.

In this regard, special mention has to be made of Kuwait for the manner in which it follows up on assisting small Caribbean countries in times of peril, and we urge the international community to work towards the preservation of that country and the maintenance of the dignity of its people.

It was with delight and glee that I read the Secretary-General's descriptive definition of globalization, as it took in some of the considerations that my country has brought before this body over the past three years. He stated,

> "Globalization is a summary term for the increasingly complex interactions between individuals, enterprises, institutions and markets across national borders. The manifold challenges it poses, challenges that cannot successfully be addressed by nation States acting on their own, provide the most immediate and obvious reason for strengthening multilateral cooperation. Globalization is manifest in the growth in trade, technology and financial flows; in the continuing growth and increasing influence of international civil society actors; in the global operations of transnational corporations; in the vast increase in transboundary communication and information exchanges, most notably via the Internet; in transboundary transmission of disease and ecological impact; and in the increased internationalization of certain types of criminal activity. Its benefits and risks are distributed unequally, and the growth and prosperity it provides for many is offset by the increasing vulnerability and marginalization of others — and by the growth of 'uncivil society'." (*A/54/1, para. 220*)

Clearly, globalization leads to the reduction of the sovereignty of States, with the weakest and the smallest being the biggest losers. Sadly lacking in the arguments for globalization is the need to give consideration to the pace, direction and content of liberalization due to different levels of development and the need to build up national capabilities. Above all is the insistence on the principle of free trade for the developing world and an exemption from the same for the industrialized countries.

Protective devices are inbuilt for farmers in the dominant economies, which include subsidies, guaranteed markets, payments not to produce beyond a certain level in order to maintain price levels and quite often insistence that imported farm belt products come in by way of limited means of processing and under the most stringent of guidelines. On the other hand, when former colonial countries provide preferences to their previous colonies of exploitation, challenges are mounted through the World Trade Organization by multinational enterprises. There is no more blatant example than Chiquita in regard to the Caribbean banana producers.

The sad thing is that there is clear knowledge that in modern times there has never been free trade. It is not my intention to de-glorify Richard Cobden and John Bright, but the repeal of the corn laws in nineteenth-century Britain had more to do with the failure of the potato crops in Britain and Ireland, strikes by workmen against wage reductions and an alliance of industrial and commercial interests against the landed gentry than it had to do with free trade. Yet irrespective of the fallacy of this free trade argument, recipients of benefits under the Lomé Convention are literally being told that they, but not the dominant Powers, must conform to and operate under the fallacy.

Any disaster to banana production in the Caribbean will affect not only the banana-producing countries, but all of the Caribbean Community. Our countries are striving to remove themselves from dependence on aid. Glenys Kinnock, a member of the European Parliament, put it succinctly when she stated that the banana trade provided a ladder out of poverty for the Caribbean region and that the call for the regime to be dropped and direct aid to be substituted was unrealistic. She went on to state that it was wrong to claim that attempts to diversify were not taking place.

In CARICOM, we do not wish to become international mendicants; otherwise the current situation, in which some dominant countries exercise undue pressure upon our modus vivendi, will increase to the point where we will have to dance to whichever tune the piper or pipers play.

The United Nations should be viewed as the foremost international body with a semblance of egalitarianism. It should not be viewed as the institution of the dominant countries in the five regional groups; and, more than that, it ought to be the body that stands up to the encroachment of multinational enterprises that attempt to stifle the lifeline or lifeblood of legitimate and sovereign countries. If indeed the United Nations is the champion of equality, of sovereignty, of the maintenance of traditional practices which in reality do not harm others, then the collective countries should denounce this imposition by a multinational entity, which will bring ultimate and profound hardships upon our humanfolk — be they young men or old men, children or maidens, matrons or old women. We have said it before, and will reiterate that what is being inflicted upon the Caribbean banana producers is an act of war.

The perils of our States are certainly not limited to bananas, and Antigua and Barbuda, as well as the majority of countries represented on the Executive Board the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), were most surprised to experience a challenge from a member of the Security Council relating to our first-country cooperation framework. This was presented, by a country with which we have cordial relations, as being a matter of principle, as Antigua and Barbuda's per capita income is $8,000 and in 1998 it ranked twenty-ninth in the *Human Development Report*. There was absolutely no mention of the fact that in the vulnerability index, Antigua and Barbuda ranks extremely high, due in part to the frequency with which hurricanes batter our twin-island State or threaten our lovely shores. Consequently, Antigua and Barbuda once again had to offer a reminder that its graduation from the loan windows of international financial institutions and from development assistance of other international agencies, based only on the narrow criterion of per capita income, which ignores the serious and persistent problems confronted by Antigua and Barbuda and most Caribbean small island developing States, is both unfair and unjust. We also had to point out that 5 per cent of our country's population consists of Montserratans who have been displaced by volcanic eruption. This has meant expanding our infrastructure to accommodate the unfortunate souls from the Emerald Isle.

Antigua and Barbuda supports the concept of UNDP and the United Nations Population Fund working with and rendering assistance to countries described as having transition economies, as well as countries which have suffered the ravages of internecine warfare, that have absorbed significant numbers of refugees and which are subject to many vulnerabilities, including natural disasters, and are victims of economic practices which work against their advancement. The work of UNDP is valued worldwide, and countries which are most vulnerable should certainly be at the forefront for

assistance and guidance. We have to ask once again if we must be penalized because of our successes. I sincerely hope that in this body, particularly among the major financial contributors, that it is not the view that small island developing States cannot advance beyond a certain level of development, as, otherwise, they would be overreaching themselves and delving into a domain reserved for members of a certain club. Antigua and Barbuda takes its role in the United Nations very seriously and will remain dedicated to the principle of egalitarianism.

We annually recite our vulnerabilities, paying most attention to the furore of natural disasters, and over the last 10 years my country has experienced four hurricanes. Whereas it is a glorious sight to witness volcanic eruptions in Montserrat from Antigua, the reality of the dangerous consequences is always present. We are additionally faced with the activities of Kick'em Jenny, an undersea volcano off the spice island of Grenada. The Caribbean Development Bank is providing a grant to the Seismic Research Unit of the University of the West Indies for the establishment of a mechanism for continuous monitoring of the volcano. According to one scholar,

> "Not only will the communities of the Grenadines and nearby islands have to guard against debris ejected during a volcanic explosion, but the entire Caribbean will be jeopardized by the threat of seismic waves, known as tsunami".

This is yet another example of our vulnerability.

Irrespective of our trials, tribulations and unfair castigations, my country, when appraised objectively, has been considered a marvel; hence its continued high ranking on the human development index. We practise the Westminster model of parliamentary democracy and do so effectively. Our national elections are open and transparent. Our first national hero, Sir Vere Cornwall Bird, appropriately dubbed Father of the Nation, died this year, and Members of Parliament in both the House and the Senate were lavish in their praise of one who was internationally acclaimed — particularly in Africa, where he had an impact on many of its leaders, both during and after the colonial era, and in the African diaspora of the New World.

We have remained committed to the empowerment of the socially and economically challenged. Women occupy senior positions in the civil service and are represented in significant numbers in the professions. In one they outnumber men. In the area of violence against women, legislation has been enacted to give greater protection to the female members of our society. In the desire of the Government to ensure that its people enjoy a decent standard of living and an improved quality of life, the Government has energetically tackled this responsibility. And, in the absence of truly vibrant private sectors to lead economic growth and development as in developed countries, the tasks performed by the Government have expanded and have become more demanding.

Antigua and Barbuda has, however, never been short on ideas as to how to help itself and as to how it can be assisted internationally in overcoming vulnerability and accelerating sustainable development. Sustainable development is foremost in our thinking. At the sixth meeting of the Commonwealth Consultative Group on Environment at the United Nations in April, we received support from the attending States for the ideas posited.

In the first place, Antigua and Barbuda hopes that the vulnerability index being developed by the Commonwealth secretariat and the World Bank task force will be introduced as soon as possible into international organizations. This must be borne in mind from the perspective that we have repeatedly addressed the limitations and unfairness of using per capita income in assessing our economic efficacy.

Secondly, following the decision of the disputes tribunal of the World Trade Organization supporting the contention of the discrimination directed at the banana regime operating under the Lomé Treaty, there is an urgent need for the World Trade Organization to apply special and differential treatment to small island developing States as it does to least developed countries. If markets in Europe are eroded for small States, those States will deteriorate economically, socially and politically to the point of placing yet another burden on the international community. This deduction is made from an analysis of the dispute tribunal's ruling, which suggests that the entire quota system for imports by the European Union from the African-Caribbean-Pacific countries for all products is now under threat.

In the third place, we would like to reiterate the call made for a disaster fund in 1995 by our Prime Minister, The Right Honourable Lester Bird. He made that call following the devastation of hurricane Luis, which wiped out one year of Antigua and Barbuda's gross domestic product in 36 perilous hours. Whereas the existing mechanisms address the purpose of relieving immediate

suffering and agony, they are woefully insufficient for reconstruction and rehabilitation.

As one who represents his country on the Committee of 24, the so-called Decolonization Committee, I was somewhat taken aback to hear the Foreign Minister of a country that had previously supported non-intervention state that the United Nations has failed to address well-known conflicts of catastrophic proportions in a timely manner. It would therefore seem that more and more countries are moving towards the acceptance of joint action in a given country if there is a clear case of genocide and a total violation of human rights.

What happened in East Timor goes well beyond the point of frustration. Since my country has from quite early on advocated the right of the people of Western Sahara to self-determination, we have been saddened each time that plans for a referendum among the Sahraoui people have been delayed. We believe that each and every postponement interferes with and impedes the will of self-determination. The happenings in East Timor will have a further impact on the will of the staunch and hardy Sahraoui people, and this gives us cause for great concern. It is important that everything be done to avoid a repetition of what has happened in East Timor after people have exercised their right of self-determination.

Like other countries, my country believes that intervention in affairs within another State should be the last resort. But there are many questions to be answered in regard to oppression, degradation and dehumanization. The East Timor example should set us working to avoid another catastrophe of that magnitude. I have long marvelled at the prophetic brilliance of the former Foreign Minister of Uruguay, Eduardo Rodriguez Larreta, who in 1946 argued that non-intervention could not be converted into a right to convoke one principle in order to violate all other principles with impunity. Nothing, however, is being advocated here except that we address ourselves meaningfully towards measures to avoid another East Timor.

So much have we been looking forward to the new millennium that we have defied the laws of mathematics and brought forward the beginning of the twenty-first century by making it come about in the last year of the twentieth century. Even at the United Nations is the year 2000 being proclaimed as the beginning of the new millennium. Be that as it may, it is not sufficient to proclaim a new millennium and to have the grand, planned celebration. The commitment to the eradication of poverty, the achievement of peace and security and cooperation for development should be sincere, meaningful and followed through to the level of profound accomplishment.

Antigua and Barbuda cherishes the United Nations and is not unmindful of the numerous advances that have come about as a result of its impact in conflict resolution, the maintenance of peace, the shelter and sanctuary provided to refugees, the promotion of human rights, the eradication of certain diseases and numerous other tangibles. Thus, Antigua and Barbuda remains ready to continue contributing to the advancement of humanity and will, as it has done in the past, insist on the principle of multilateralism. Together, our countries, large and small, can make contributions in overcoming the plagues with which we are afflicted and move towards peace, cohesion, harmony and the alleviation of poverty in the coming century.

The Acting President: We have heard the last speaker in the general debate for this meeting.

I shall now call on those representatives who wish to speak in exercise of the right of reply.

May I remind members that statements in exercise of the right of reply are limited to 10 minutes for the first intervention and to five minutes for the second intervention and should be made by delegations from their seats.

Mr. Mutaboba (Rwanda): My delegation had not intended to take the floor, but after hearing the baseless allegations and lucubrations of Minister Elodia Ndombasi of the Democratic Republic of the Congo, I felt compelled to speak in order to set the record straight.

The international community is well aware of the tragedy that Rwanda endured and which culminated in the genocide of 1994. The Minister from the Democratic Republic of the Congo speaks of aggression. We will be brief in addressing this issue, because it would take us too long to respond to his long and confusing speech. But the first aggression was against Rwanda and started when the genocidal army was allowed to enter the territory of Zaire — today the Democratic Republic of the Congo — with its weapons.

Secondly, they were allowed to regroup, train and recruit from the refugee camps in broad daylight. Those refugee camps, my delegation wishes to remind the

Assembly, were located along the border of Rwanda and the Democratic Republic of the Congo. In that way they were fed and granted refugee status, in contravention of all provisions of the Organization's Charter.

Thirdly, quite a large number of Rwandans — about 2 million — were held hostage by these criminal forces, who had the support of the late President Mobutu. This went on for quite a long time and culminated in cross-border attacks.

What today's Congolese leadership, under President Kabila, cannot deny is its grateful acceptance of the assistance that it sought and obtained from Rwanda and others in the liberation war against Mobutu and his dictatorship. The authorities of the Democratic Republic of the Congo did acknowledge that assistance, as indicated in document S/1999/205. In paragraph 9 of that document, the Congolese authorities stated that

> "the Alliance des Forces Démocratiques pour la Libération du Congo (ADFL) had accepted military and logistical assistance from several friendly countries, including Rwanda and Uganda."

In paragraph 10, they recognize the *quid pro quo* of this assistance in the following words:

> "Those two countries would benefit from providing that assistance since an incidental consequence of the war of liberation was the elimination of tension along their borders which posed a threat to their security and, in particular, the neutralization of members of the former Rwandan armed forces (FAR), Hutu rebels (Interahamwe) and Lord's Resistance Army soldiers."

That is the same army which is being pursued for 2,000 kilometres.

There are many examples we could give which clearly point to the twin root causes of the 1997 crisis in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. At this stage it would be pointless to go back to fuelling the crisis. As far as the security of the region and of the neighbouring countries is concerned, there are internal problems in the Congo as well as external links. Whether or not the Congolese authorities recognize this, it is a fact, and we should distinguish between fact and fiction and between perception and reality.

When we hear the same authorities, including the Minister who just spoke, say that those who committed genocide in Rwanda were justified and deserve support now as they did in the past, these and other similar quotations are actionable statements for which the Government of President Kabila have to answer before a relevant court.

In another statement, the official media of the Democratic Republic of the Congo in Kinshasa called on the population to treat the enemy as "a virus, a mosquito or garbage which must be crushed with determination and without pity". Those words were said by the same Minister who is fuelling the crisis we are trying to resolve today.

When I hear such inflammatory speeches in the Assembly, it reminds me that the last time I saw such a fiasco was in the biggest market in Ethiopia. There is a similarity between that market and this Assembly. It is a pity.

But when we look back at the work of the Security Council, we can see that the commissions that were set up to deal with the crisis are no longer active. But we have to determine and deal with the root causes, especially because of the cycle of impunity, where the same offenders continue to commit crimes without being punished. That is wrong. That is why, by paragraph 1 of its resolution 1161 (1998) of 9 April 1998, the Security Council requested that the Secretary-General of this Organization reactivate the International Commission of Inquiry, with the following mandate:

> "(a) to collect information and investigate reports relating to the sale, supply and shipment of arms and related *matériel* to former Rwandan government forces and militias in the Great Lakes region of central Africa, in violation of Security Council resolution 918 (1994), 997 (1995) and 1011 (1995);
>
> "(b) to identify parties aiding and abetting the legal sale to or acquisition of arms by former Rwandan government forces and militias, contrary to the resolutions referred to above;
>
> "(c) to make recommendations relating to the illegal flow of arms in the Great Lakes region."

Paragraph 87 of the report of the International Commission of Inquiry, contained in document S/1998/1096, states,

> "Persistent reports received by the Commission from numerous sources across southern Africa overwhelmingly attest to this transformation: that the ex-FAR and Interahamwe, once a defeated and dispersed remnant, have now become a significant component of the international alliance against the Congolese rebels and their presumed sponsors, Rwanda and Uganda. The Commission is convinced that the ex-FAR and Interahamwe have continued to receive arms and ammunition, both through their close links with other armed groups in Angola, Burundi, Uganda and elsewhere, and most recently, from the Government of the Democratic Republic of the Congo. Despite the imposition upon them of a Security Council arms embargo, which has remained in force since the genocide of 1994, the ex-FAR and Interahamwe have now become in effect the allies of the Government of the Democratic Republic of the Congo and its allies, the Governments of Angola, Chad, Namibia and Zimbabwe. The new relationship has conferred a form of legitimacy on the Interahamwe and the ex-FAR. This is a profoundly shocking state of affairs."

In that light, we would like to draw the attention of the Assembly to the sanctions Committee referred to in Security Council resolution 1161 (1998) of 9 April 1998. It is still in place and should be reactivated in order to monitor the situation closely to find out what is going on.

Before concluding, I should like to ask the Assembly to make sure that, once and for all, we move forward in resolving the crisis in the Congo. The solution remains the disarming of those criminals who have been perpetuating the genocide all over the region, and carrying with them the ideology of genocide. If we do not do so, and if we do not divert the attention of the public away from that ideology, we will not resolve the problems but create even more of them.

Mr. Acemah (Uganda): Uganda's position on the internal conflict in the Democratic Republic of the Congo is well known. It has been clearly enunciated here in the General Assembly, in the Security Council, in the Organization of African Unity and elsewhere. Ugandan troops are in the Democratic Republic of the Congo as a result of a bilateral agreement between the two countries. My Minister made clear his position on that issue last week in our policy statement to the General Assembly at this fifty-fourth session. I shall therefore not waste the precious time of the General Assembly with a repetition our well-known position.

I would, however, like to deny categorically the false, malicious and gratuitous allegations made this afternoon by the representative of the Democratic Republic of the Congo against Uganda. I would like to reiterate that Uganda is committed to the implementation of the Lusaka Agreement. We hope that all signatories, including the Democratic Republic of the Congo, are committed to the success of the Lusaka Agreement. I hardly need remind the representative of the Democratic Republic of the Congo that, without the support of the Government and people of Uganda, the Democratic Republic of the Congo would today most probably still be called Zaire and would be under the dictatorship of Mobutu Sese Seko and his cronies. The representative would most likely be hiding somewhere in the jungles of the Congo. The unnecessary diatribe which the representative of the Democratic Republic of the Congo unleashed against Uganda is clearly in violation of the letter, and certainly of the spirit, of the Lusaka Agreement, which his President signed and promised to uphold.

Mr. Mwamba Kapanga (Democratic Republic of the Congo) (*spoke in French*): I do not intend to launch into polemics. I would simply like to reply briefly to the statements made by the representatives of Rwanda and Uganda.

I shall start by saying that, indeed, there was genocide in Rwanda, and 500,000 people met their deaths in the course of that genocide, which took place in 1994. However, I must also add that the genocide was perpetrated by Rwandans, against Rwandans, on Rwandan soil. Not a single Congolese went to Rwanda to kill a single Rwandan. On the contrary, the Congolese people were obliged to receive in their own land more than 1.2 million Rwandans, and it is those Rwandans who have created the poverty and the desolation in the east of our country.

Yes, there was genocide in Rwanda, and we have acknowledged the fact. That genocide caused the deaths of civilians. But the fact that there was genocide in Rwanda, perpetrated by Rwandans against Rwandans, does not mean that today we must tolerate the soldiers sent by Rwanda into Congolese territory to kill the people

of the Congo — massacres that can only be considered acts of genocide against the Congolese people.

The Rwandans say they are on Congolese soil for reasons of security. That was the argument that was made at the beginning of the war, but later we all discovered that Rwandans were really on our soil not in the interests of the security of Rwanda, as the Minister claimed, but rather because of the Congo's resources. The recent battles in Kisangani proved that to us. The Rwandan and Ugandan press have said that the Rwandan and Ugandan soldiers fought on Congolese territory not over matters of security but to control the resources of the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

I should like to say briefly that my country has committed itself to respecting the Lusaka Agreement, and we intend to do so. We are prepared to ensure that the Agreement is implemented. But I must also say that it is not the Democratic Republic of the Congo that is holding up the implementation of the Agreement; it is, rather, those who say that they want peace and security in the region. Today they are in the process of massing their troops, bringing in more weapons and occupying new areas. If they truly wished for a ceasefire and for peace, they would not have continued to do that after signing the Lusaka Agreement.

I should like to repeat very clearly that the Democratic Republic of the Congo has committed itself to respecting the Lusaka Agreement. That is why we requested the Security Council and the Secretary-General of the United Nations to speed up the process of implementing the peace Agreement by sending the peacekeeping force as soon as possible so that peace can prevail, not only in the Congo, but throughout the entire Great Lakes region.

The meeting rose at 7.40 p.m.